CAUSES OF PERSISTENT RURAL POVERTY IN THIKA DISTRICT OF KENYA, c.1953-2000

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the causes of poverty among the residents of Thika District in Kenya over the period 1953-2000. Using the articulation of modes of production perspective, the study traces the dynamics of poverty to the geography, history and politics of Thika District. The thrust of the argument is that livelihoods in the district changed during the period under investigation, but not necessarily for the better. Landlessness, collapse of the coffee industry, intergenerational poverty, and the ravages of diseases (particularly of HIV/AIDS) are analysed. This leads to the conclusion that causes of poverty in Thika District during the period under examination were complex as one form of deprivation led to another.

The study established that poverty in Thika District during the period under review was a product of a process of exclusion from the centre of political power and appropriation. While race was the basis for allocation of public resources in colonial Kenya, ethnicity has dominated the independence period. Consequently, one would have expected the residents of Thika District, the home of Kenya's first president, Mzee Jomo Kenyatta, to have benefited inordinately from public resources during his rule. Kenyatta's administration, however, mainly benefited the Kikuyu elite. The study therefore demonstrates that during the period under examination, the Kikuyu, like any other Kenyan community, were a heterogeneous group whose differences were accentuated by class relations. Subaltern groups in Thika District therefore benefited minimally from state patronage, just like similar groups elsewhere in rural Kenya.

By the late 1970s, the level of deprivation in rural Kenya had been contained as a result of favourable prices for the country's agricultural exports. But in the subsequent period, poverty increased under the pressures of world economic recession and slowdowns in trade. The situation was worse for Kikuyu peasants as the Second Republic of President Daniel Moi deliberately attempted undermine the Kikuyu economically. For the majority of Thika residents, this translated into further marginalisation as the Moi regime lumped them together with the Kikuyu elite who had benefitted inordinately from public resources during the Kenyatta era.

This study demonstrates that no single factor can explain the prevalence of poverty in Thika District during the period under consideration. However, the poor in the district devised survival mechanisms that could be replicated elsewhere. Indeed, the dynamics of poverty in Thika District represent a microcosm not just for the broader Kenyan situation but also of rural livelihoods elsewhere in the world. The study recommends land reform and horticulture as possible ways of reducing poverty among rural communities. Further, for a successful global war on poverty there is an urgent need to have the West go beyond rhetoric and deliver on its promises to make poverty history.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

ABS	African Broadcasting Service
ADEA	Association for the Development of Education in Africa
AFC	Agricultural Finance Corporation
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
AIDSCAP	AIDS Control and Prevention Project
ART	Antiretroviral Treatment
ASALs	Arid and Semi-Arid Lands
BI	Bamako Initiative
BNA	Basic Needs Approach
CAFOD	Catholic Fund for Overseas Development
CACC	Constituency AIDS Control Committee
CAP	Crop Advance Payment
CBO	Community-Based Organisation
CBK	Coffee Board of Kenya
CDO	Community Development Officer
CBS	Central Bureau of Statistics
COTEPA	Coffee and Tea Parliamentary Association
COTU	Central Organisation of Trade Unions
CPCS	Co-operative Productive Credit Scheme
CRF	Coffee Research Foundation
CSWs	Commercial Sex Workers
DACC	District AIDS Control Committee
DAO	District Agricultural Officer
DC	District Commissioner
DDC	District Development Committee
DFRD	District Focus for Rural Development
DTDO	District Trade Development Officer
DMS	Director of Medical Services
ESAPs	Economic Structural Adjustment Programmes

EABC	East African Bag and Cordage
GEMA	Gikuyu, Embu and Meru Association
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GMR	Guaranteed Minimum Return
GNP	Gross National Product
HDI	Human Development Index
HIV	Human Immunology Virus
IADP	Integrated Agricultural Development Programme
IAP	Integrated AIDS Programme
IBEAC	Imperial British East Africa Company
ICA	International Coffee Agreement
ICDC	Industrial and Commercial Development Corporation
ICO	International Coffee Organisation
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IRS	Integrated Rural Survey
KADU	Kenya African Democratic Union
KANU	Kenya African National Union
KCA	Kikuyu Central Association
KDHS	Kenya Demographic and Health Survey
KEM	Kikuyu, Embu and Meru
KEMSA	Kenya Medical Supply Agency
KEPP	Kenya Entrepreneurial Promotion Programme
KCGA	Kenya Coffee Growers Association
KFA	Kenya Farmers Union
KGGCU	Kenya Grain Growers Co-operative Union
KNFTU	Kenya National Federation of Trade Unions
KPAWU	Kenya Plantation and Agricultural Workers Union
KPCU	Kenya Planters Co-operative Union
KPU	Kenya People's Union
MCT	Municipal Council of Thika

MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MoF&P	Ministry of Finance and Planning
MoH	Ministry of Health
MP	Member of Parliament
MYWO	Maendeleo ya Wanawake Organisation
NACC	National AIDS Control Council
NASCOP	National AIDS and STIs Control Programme
NCC	Nairobi County Council
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
NNGOs	Northern Non-Governmental Organisations
NPEP	National Poverty Eradication Plan
NSSF	National Social Security Fund
PACC	Provincial AIDS Control Committee
PC	Provincial Commissioner
PLWAs	People Living with AIDS
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
PSC	Public Service Commission
RoK	Republic of Kenya
SACCO	Savings and Credit Co-operative Society
SCIP	Smallholder Coffee Improvement Project
SRDP	Special Rural Development Programme
UNAIDS	United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Education Fund
VCT	Voluntary Counselling and Testing
UBS	Union Banking Section
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WHO	World Health Organisation
WMS	Welfare Monitoring Survey

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INTRODUCTION

This study has its origins in personal experience, as well as two sets of data which came to my attention. First, the researcher participated in the 1989 national population census as an enumerator in Thika District and witnessed conditions of severe deprivation during the exercise. Second, statistics from the Welfare Monitoring Survey (WMS) of 1997 indicated that poverty in Thika District was on the rise compared to the rest of the Central Province.[1] By 2002, 48.4 percent of the population in the district was reportedly poverty-stricken.[2] These statistics contradicted popular belief in Kenya that such abject poverty affected areas such as Nyanza and North Eastern provinces but not Central Kenya. Third, in 1998 HIV/AIDS prevalence in Thika District stood at 33 percent of the population, the highest in the country.[3] These factors led this researcher to conceive this study, believing that without a proper understanding of the underlying causes of these problems it would be difficulty to formulate strategies to minimize them.

In the last two decades, the need to combat poverty has increased at national, regional and global levels. This concern has its roots in a rapid rise in poverty levels in many parts of the world. The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (World Bank) defines poverty as pronounced deprivation in well-being.[4] Poverty is thus characterised by the inability of individuals and families to obtain a minimal standard of living and welfare. This index is measured in terms of household income and expenditure per capita, including domestic production. Attempts to compare income and poverty levels across societies led the World Bank to invent the concept of purchasing power parity (PPP), which accounts for currency fluctuation and local consumption habits. PPP is commonly referred to as the market-basket approach.

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[1] Ministry of Finance and Planning (MoF&P), *Thika District Development Plan 2002-2008* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 2002), pp. 20, 21.

[2] *Ibid*. p. 9.

[3] Republic of Kenya (RoK), *AIDS in Kenya* (Nairobi: Ministry of Health, 2001), p. 6.

[4] World Bank, *Attacking Poverty* (Washington, D.C: World Bank, 2000), p. 15.

Using PPP, a poverty line distinguishing poor from non-poor populations is established. A person or household is considered below the 'poverty line' if their income falls below a minimum standard required to provide basic human needs. The poverty line depends on a minimum standard of living within each country, region or culture. The 1990 World Development Report used an upper poverty line of US$370 per capita for the poor as the cut-off level for absolute poverty and a lower poverty line of US$275 for the very poor. The poverty threshold has been adjusted from US$1 in 1985 to US$1.08 in 1993 PPP prices respectively.[5]

Like other money-metric poverty lines, the 1985 one-dollar-a-day poverty line has several limitations. First, it is difficult (and rather arbitrary) to establish a yardstick that has universal validity and therefore useful for international comparisons. Second, such a definition rests on the accuracy of statistics, which are often incomplete, especially in developing countries. Third, a definition based on income encounters the range of moral objections to valuing life only in material terms when there is more to life than just material well-being. Finally, an income measure of poverty does not make allowance for other critical aspects such as social security.

Advocates of a-dollar-a-day threshold argue that the official poverty line measure was adopted as a guideline and is not the only yardstick for identifying the poor. Martin Ravallion of the World Bank cautions that 'any poverty line is to some degree an arbitrary yardstick. So it is important to try different lines and see how the choice affects poverty comparisons across countries and regions'.[6] In the absence of a universal measure, we must make do with the US$1 threshold while taking into consideration the underlying definitions, choices and assumptions behind the statistics as well as the use of alternative poverty lines and measurements.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) uses several criteria to measure poverty. These include life expectancy and child mortality as well as access

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[5] UNDP, 'Dollar a Day: How Much Does it Say?' (UNDP, Brazil), p. 14.

[6] *Ibid*., p. 15.

to education, health care, nutrition and other social services.[7] In this case, poverty is multidimensional and has important non-economic dimensions.[8] Poverty is therefore not just lack of income but it also involves other forms of privation that cause powerlessness and voicelessness.

Since poverty is both a cause and consequence of deprivation, inequality is an integral concept in poverty-related studies. The two concepts are easily confused and used interchangeably but they are not synonymous. Inequality means that not everyone has an equal share of the resources, while being poor is being in deprivation or want. The two conditions are congruent and not conflicting, and are mainly evident in societies with high levels of poverty.

Similarly, there are different levels of poverty. Absolute poverty means inadequate means to sustain human life such as lack of adequate food, clothing, shelter and health care. Relative poverty is defined in comparison with the standard of living of other income groups or households that have less than half the median household income. Relative poverty is measured in relation to commonly agreed needs for a decent standard of living in a particular society. Thus, one may be rich in a particular society and be relatively poor when compared to living standards in another society.

Using a market-based poverty threshold, it was estimated in 2001 that one billion of the world's six billion people were poor.[9] However, poverty levels vary from one part of the world to another. Of all the Third World economies, it is only in Africa that poverty levels have been on the rise in the last few decades. The definition of poverty is also complex, just as poverty itself has proved elusive in spite of it having received growing attention in the twenty-first century.

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[7] UNDP, *Human Development Report* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 5.

[8] Deepa Narayan, *Voices of the Poor* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2000), p. 9.

[9] World Bank, *Attacking Poverty*, p. 15.

Other dimensions of poverty include vulnerability, insecurity and defencelessness. Vulnerable people have insufficient assets to withstand shocks, be they the result of changes in the economy or those wrought about by natural causes. Vulnerability may be due to factors such as landlessness, ill health, unemployment or natural disasters. Poverty may also be the result of discrimination based on gender, disability, creed, ethnicity, race or age. The poor and vulnerable become more susceptible to deprivation since they have few assets to cushion them against calamities.

Poor people may be categorized into the chronic and transient poor. Chronically poor people are those who always live in poverty because they have few assets or opportunities to escape poverty. Such people have high chances of causing intergenerational poverty. Transient poor people are those who have the potential to move out of poverty, such as skilled individuals who are out of work. Poverty is thus not a permanent condition and may depend on a household's life cycle. For instance, when children are young and unproductive, the family is more likely to be poor than when the children become economically productive adults.

The above definitions cut across many categories of the poor. Evidently, typologies of poverty are fluid. For the purposes of this study, poverty is defined as physical want, deprivation and inability to obtain a minimal standard of living. Among the residents of Thika District, the focus of this study, this researcher noted that besides the econometric determination of poverty other aspects of well-being provided better indicators of socio-economic status and well-being. These indicators included type of housing, ability to meet dietary needs and clothing, landownership, possession of livestock and ability to educate children. The poor were identified as those who did not own land, had no access to decent shelter, experienced frequent food shortages or could not retain children in school. The interconnectedness of these factors makes poverty a complex phenomenon to study.

This study draws from the extant literature on poverty and development-related studies. Literature on poverty in Kenya is extensive. It comprises scholarly works and reports by donors and other agencies. The works are broadly on the causes of poverty in the country and they are informed mainly by the underdevelopment theory and the paradigm of articulation of modes of production. The value of the articulation of modes of production as an explanatory model is not in the creation of typologies or categories of analysis but rather in providing the tools for the analysis of a particular case.[10] Ethnic and regional inequalities are traced to politics of patrimony and patron-client networks, which are accentuated by factors such as ecological crises and inability to access resources. These and other aspects of poverty are captured in the following thematic analysis of the existing literature: first on Kenya in general and then on Thika District specifically.

Landlessness and near landlessness have been cited as major causes of poverty in Kenya. Land alienation and redistribution in the early colonial and independence periods respectively have been analyzed in many works. Discussing Kikuyu land problems, Berman argues that the onset of colonial rule marked the end of Kikuyu expansion, and their sense of loss over the 'stolen land' was thus compounded by an inability to occupy what might also have been theirs had it not been for the British conquest.[11] This competition for land between the Kikuyu and the incoming white settlers marked the genesis of a deep and abiding distrust between the colonial administration and the Kikuyu. This argument is further expounded by, among others, Kanogo[12] and Throup.[13] Collier and Lal further argue that the low wages paid to Kenyans who also had limited land compounded their misery and stifled their vertical mobility in the period after the attainment of independence.[14] The extent to which landlessness and low wages contributed to the impoverishment of the residents of Thika District during the 1953 – 2000 period is scrutinized.

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[10] Martin Klein, 'The Use of Mode of Production in Historical Analysis', *Canadian Journal of African Studies,* 19, 1(1995), pp. 9 - 12.

[11] Bruce Berman, *Control and Crisis in Colonial Kenya: The Dialectic of Domination* (London: James Currey, 1990).

[12] Tabitha Kanogo, *Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau 1905-1963* (London: James Currey, 1987).

[13] David Throup, E*conomic and Social Origins of Mau Mau* (Oxford: James Currey: 1987).

[14] Paul Collier and Deepak Lal, *Labour and Poverty in Kenya 1900 - 1980* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986).

In an analysis on the emergence of a bourgeoisie in Kenya, Kitching demonstrates how among the Kiambu Kikuyu, the *athomi* (the elite), comprising chiefs and tribunal elders who were a minority, purchased land from the non-progressive Kikuyu, accentuating the process of differentiation in the district.[15] This process is further examined by Cowen who illustrates how revenues from commodity production, particularly of wattle, coffee, tea and dairy farming, contributed to differentiation in the households in the district as early as the 1930s.[16] Well-to-do households maintained their privileged position in society by investing in formal education, which assured them larger future incomes through acquisition of land and investment in business. This process is also discussed by Swainson who analyzes the transformation of the Kenyan bourgeoisie, particularly of Kikuyu accumulators whose roots are traceable to pre-colonial 'primitive accumulation'.[17] Similarly, Leys revised his earlier thesis of underdevelopment by acknowledging the presence of an African bourgeoisie whose roots could be traced to the pre-colonial period, and whose organizational skills and productive capacity increasingly shaped them into a modern and autonomous class.[18] These works provide invaluable information that helps contextualize the process of differentiation among the residents of Thika District, the focus of the current study.

In the post-colonial period, the use of political power to dispossess some people of land has been pervasive.[19] By the end of the first decade of independence, serious criticism was leveled against the government for encouraging speculation in land by

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[15] Gavin Kitching, *Class and Economic Change in Kenya*: *The Making of an African Petite Bourgeoisie 1905-1970* (New Haven Conn: Yale University Press, 1980).

[16] Michael Cowen, 'Commodity Production in Kenya's Central Province' in Judith Heyer, Roberts Pepe and Williams Gavin (eds.), *Rural Development in Tropical Africa* (London: Macmillan, 1981).

[17] Nicola Swainson, *The Development of Corporate Capitalism in Kenya 1918-77* (New York: Heinemann, 1980).

[18] Colin Leys, *The Rise and Fall of Development Theory* (Nairobi: African Educational Publishers, 1996).

[19] M.P.K. Sorrenson, *Land Reform in the Kikuyu Country: A Study in Government Policy* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1967).

groups of wealthy Kenyans, who, because of their political connections, were able to obtain access to state land that should have gone to the landless people as was envisaged in the resettlement programmes.[20] At the same time, seizures of land intended for smallholder farms became widespread (see chapter two). These processes disinherited many people.

Land reform and the concomitant process of marginalization in Kenya have also been discussed by van Zwanenberg[21] and Hunt.[22] Of wider scope is the seminal work by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) mission in 1972. The ILO mission identified unemployment, poverty and poor income distribution as factors that adversely affected Kenya's development.[23] For many Kenyans, persistent poverty is a consequence of marginal involvement in the monetary economy, dependence on a small subsistence economy, and reliance on limited land endowments.[24] Crawford and Thorbecke observe that 'poverty was a rural problem resulting from the limited availability of cultivable land, unequal distribution of that land and limited employment opportunities in the modern sector'.[25] These works, though relevant to the current study, have a wider focus and cover a different time span from that of the proposed study.

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[20] Norman Miller, *Kenya: The Quest for Prosperity* (Boulder, Colombia: Westview Press 1984).

[21] Roger van Zwanenberg with Anne King, *An Economic History of Kenya and Uganda* (London: Macmillan, 1975).

[22] Diana Hunt, *The Impending Crisis in Kenya: The Case for Land Reform* (Aldershot: Gower, 1984).

[23] ILO, *Employment, Incomes and Inequality: A Strategy for Increasing Productive Employment in Kenya* (Geneva, 1972).

[24] Collier and Lal, *Labour and Poverty in Kenya.*

[25] E. Crawford and E. Thorbecke, *The Analysis of Food Poverty: An Illustration From Kenya* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1978).

Dependency theory writers like Brett[26], Leys[27] and Kaplinsky[28] associate Kenya's socio-economic problems with the colonial experience. These scholars posit that the productive and distributive relations introduced by colonialism impoverished the masses through alienation of land and other natural resources. This process of exploitation was accentuated through skewed labour and tax policies through which surplus value was extracted from Kenya and exported to the metropolis. The inadequacy of the underdevelopment theory lies in its inability to explain inherent inequality evident among Kenyans to date. The poor have remained poor as the bourgeoisie continue to get richer. The gulf between the two groups has been widening over the years. Further, dependency theory does not acknowledge Africans' involvement in the exploitation of resources. These inadequacies are what led to revision of the dependency approach by neo-liberal theorists.

To neo-liberalists, the state has stifled national development on more than one count. Ajulu,[29] Atieno-Odhiambo,[30] Anderson,[31] Barkan,[32] Chege,[33] Grosh,[34] Hazlewood,[35]

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[26] E. A. Brett, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment in East Africa: The Politics of Economic Change 1919-1939* (New York: Heinemann 1973).

[27] Colin Leys, *Underdevelopment in Kenya: The Politics of Neo-colonialism 1964-71* (New York: Heinemann, 1975).

[28] Raphael Kaplinsky, *Readings on Multinational Corporations in Kenya* (Nairobi: Oxford Press, 1978).

[29] Rok Ajulu, 'Politicised Ethnicity, Competitive Politics and Conflict in Kenya: A Historical Perspective', *African Studies*, 61, 2 (2002).

[30] Elisha Atieno-Odhiambo, 'Hegemonic Enterprises and Instrumentalists of Survival: Ethnicity and Democracy in Kenya', *African Studies*, 61, 2 (2002).

[31] David Anderson, 'The "Crisis of Capitalism" and Kenya's Social History: A Comment', *African Affairs*, 92, 367 (1993), 285-293.

[32] Joel Barkan, *et al.*, 'Decentralization and Democratization in Sub-Saharan Africa' (Occasional Papers 45 - 49, International Programs, University of Iowa, 1998).

[33] Michael Chege, 'Introducing Race as a Variable into the Political Economy of Kenya Debate: An Incendiary Idea', *African Affairs*, 97, 387 (1998).

[34] Barbara Grosh, *Public Enterprise in Kenya: What Works, What Doesn't and Why* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1991).

Himbara,[36] Kanyinga,[37] Lofchie,[38] Miller,[39] Toye,[40] and Swainson,[41] are among the key proponents of this approach, and argue that the Kenyan bourgeoisie is an agent of foreign capital. To these scholars, political power determines access to public resources. The skewed development evident in Kenya is thus a manifestation of the influence of the state in determining access to national resources. Consequently, state involvement in the country's economy through public institutions (parastatals) has resulted in nepotism, lethargy, corruption and red tape - all of which have made parastals a drain on public resources. These works however address the dysfunctional nature of the state at the national level while the current study is meant to examine the authors' ideas as they apply to Thika District.

In *Kenya Poverty Profiles* covering the period 1982 - 1992, Mukui shows that poverty is regionally specific and is attributable to culture and nature.[42] Vital statistics for the current study are obtained from Mukui's work, which is fairly current. A report on 'The Political Economy of Poverty Reduction in Kenya' by Tostensen and Ikiara highlighting the causes of poverty in Kenya prior to 1980 is also significant for the

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[35] Arthur Hazlewood, *The Economy of Kenya: The Kenyatta Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).

[36] David Himbara, *Kenyan Capitalists, the State and Development* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1994).

[37] Karuti Kanyinga, 'Ethnicity, Patronage and Class in a Local Arena: "High" and "Low" Politics in Kiambu, Kenya, 1982-92' in Karuti Kanyinga, Andrew Kiondo and Per Tidemand (eds.), *The New Local Level Politics in East Africa* (Stockholm: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, Research Paper No. 95, 1994).

[38] Michael Lofchie, 'The Politics of Agricultural Policy' in Joel Barkan, (eds.) *Beyond Capitalism vs Socialism in Kenya and Tanzania* (London: Lynne Rienner, 1994).

[39] Miller, *Kenya.*

[40] John Toye, 'Interested Government Politics and Adjustment' in Peter Gibbon, Yusuf Bangura and Arve Ofstad (eds.), *Authoritarianism, Democracy and Adjustment: The Politics of Economic Reform in Africa* (Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1992).

[41] Swainson, *The Development of Corporate Capitalism.*

[42] Thinguri Mukui, *Kenya's Poverty Profiles 1982-92* (Nairobi: Ministry of Planning and National Development, 1994).

current study. The report attributed poverty to inertia in the government, mirrored in 'too much rhetoric and too little action'.[43] The authors contended that what Kenya had achieved in the fight against poverty by 1980 was minimal alleviation of want and not a reduction in poverty levels. Although the authors contended the government had relieved people from want, there is need to have a context-specific study to examine the extent to which this has been attained such as the current one.

A recent survey on poverty in Kenya by Bahemuka *et al.* offers general insights on inequality and deprivation in both urban and poor households in Kenya. In this sociological study, poverty is viewed as emanating from 'open-unemployment, entrenched by structural inequities, highly skewed income distribution and allocation of national resources'.[44] Being a survey, the study lacks detailed and an in-depth analysis of the causes of poverty. The proposed study attempts to place the impoverishment of the residents of Thika District into historical perspective.

In 1999, Rugalema carried out a small-scale study on commercial agriculture in the Eastern and Western provinces of Kenya. According to his findings, most estates lacked satisfactory recreational facilities and to make up for this workers indulged in 'risky' behaviour such as alcohol abuse and visits to commercial sex workers.[45] Such behaviour was blamed for rapid spread of HIV/AIDS among plantation workers in the affected areas. Such insights will be useful to the current study as Thika District has plantations such as those studied by Rugalema.

Studies dealing with Thika District are scarce and those that exist have a different focus. Stamp's work, for example, addresses the intra-ethnic conflicts that characterized the running of the Municipal Council of Thika during the first decade of

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[43] Gerrishon Ikiara and Arne Tostensen, 'The Political Economy of Poverty Reduction in Kenya' (A Report for the Chr. Michelsen Institute: Stockholm: SIDA, 1996).

[44] Judith Bahemuka, *et al.* (eds.), *Analysis and Evaluation of Poverty in Kenya Poverty Revisited* (UNESCO, 1998).

[45] Gabriel Rugalema, 'HIV/AIDS and the Commercial agricultural Sector of Kenya: Impact, Vulnerability, Susceptibility and Coping Strategies' (New York: FAO/UNDP, 1999).

independence, and how these struggles affected the delivery of essential services.[46] Although the current study draws insights from Stamp's study, the methodology and scope are different.

Kinyanjui studied industrial growth in Thika from the 1920s to the 1980s. She highlighted the factors that influenced the location of major agro-processing industries in Thika town. She concluded that there existed obvious links between the town and the hinterland.[47] The setting of the study is urban and there is need to address the issue of change and continuity in light of the recent changes in Thika's industrial development. The current study explores the links between town and country in relation to poverty.

Other studies that touch on Thika District are by Adagala, Hyde, and Karega. Adagala's 1991 study, focuses on female-headed households in coffee plantations of Kiambu District, then encompassing Thika District.[48] Hyde's study examines the struggles between the state, capital and labour as mirrored in plantation agriculture in the late colonial period. The work highlights the suppression of workers' initiatives and the rise of trade unionism in present-day Thika and Kiambu districts.[49] These two studies offer invaluable information to the current study, as does Karega's. Karega investigated sexual exploitation among women in commercial agriculture and Export Processing Zones (EPZs) in Kenya, focusing on coffee estates in Thika. Her study showed how women were compromised in gendered relations mainly because of their economic powerlessness.[50] The study addressed only sexual exploitation and did not

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[46] Patricia Stamp, 'Governing Thika: Dilemmas of Municipal Politics in Kenya' (Ph.D. Thesis, University of London, 1980).

[47] Mary Kinyanjui, 'The Location and Structure of Manufacturing Industries in Thika' (MA Thesis, Kenyatta University, 1987).

[48] Adagala Kavetsa, 'Households and Historical Change on Plantations in Kenya', in Eleonora Masini and Susan Stratigos (eds.), *Women, Households and Change* (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 1991).

[49] Nicholas Hyde, 'Plantation Struggles in Kenya: Trade Unionism on the Land 1947-1963' (Ph.D. Thesis, University of London, 2000).

[50] Regina Karega, 'Assessment of Workplace Sexual Harassment in the Commercial Agriculture and Textile Manufacturing Sectors in Kenya' (International Human Rights Fund, May 2002).

address other forms of privation that face workers in agricultural plantations, which receive fair attention in the current study.

In 1997 Kielmann carried out a small-scale study on the social impact of HIV/AIDS awareness campaign and condom distribution programme in Thika town. This study identified different types of transactional sex relations.[51] The women who were involved in commercial sex enjoyed little or no control over their sexuality, owing to economic powerlessness, which in return compromised their ability to negotiate safe sex. Similarly, Aliber *et al.* carried out a study on HIV/AIDS and land rights in Gachugi village, Kamwangi Division, Thika District.[52] The findings revealed a high correlation between illicit alcohol consumption, indiscriminate sex and the spread of HIV/AIDS in the area. These studies are of some relevance to the current one, which examines the influence of poverty in the spread of the HIV/AIDS in Thika District.

In her 1992 MA thesis, Ruth Kiboro gave an in-depth analysis of expenditure patterns among households in the Gatundu Division, Thika District.[53] Her findings showed that among the poor households, food took up a high percentage of their earnings while there was minimal or no budgetary allocation for health care. Kiboro's study is useful to the current one as it provides some basic information about Thika District.

Although literature on poverty and inequality is in abundance, not much of it focuses on these issues in Kenya, and none on Thika District in particular. Studies on Thika District mainly focus on urbanization, industrialization and governance. The current study however examines poverty in this district, which has abundant resources. The works reviewed above however provide important background information to the

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[51] Karina Kielmann, 'Prostitution, Risk and Responsibility: Paradigms of AIDS Prevention and Women's Identities in Thika, Kenya', in Marcia Inhorn and Peter Brown (eds.), *The Anthropology of Infectious Disease: International Health Perspectives* (Amsterdam: Gordon and Breach Publishers, 1997).

[52] Michael Aliber, *et al.*, *The Impact of HIV/AIDS on Land Rights: Case Studies From Kenya* (Cape Town: HRSC Publishers, 2004).

[53] Ruth Kiboro, 'An Empirical Analysis of Household Expenditure Patterns in Rural Kenya: A Case Study of Gatundu Division' (MA.Thesis, Kenyatta University, 1992).

current one. The current study is important as it examines poverty from a historical and holistic perspective, thus filling a lacuna in existent historiography.

The current study attempts to contribute to poverty alleviation by investigating the causes of persistent poverty in a district many would expect to be relatively poverty-free as it has high agricultural potential among other bases for creation of wealth. Being a longitudinal study, it examines the relationship between the politics of patrimony and transformation of livelihoods among residents of Thika District. The study explores how institutions and other structures ameliorate or exacerbate poverty. The relationship between various forms of deprivation is also investigated by giving the marginalised groups in Thika District an opportunity to voice their experiences in relation to distribution of public resources.

This study is predicated on the assumption that poverty is a product of exploitation that it is perpetuated through skewed relations of production and control of the means of production. Using the perspective of articulation of the modes of production as the tool of analysis, the study analyzes how the residents of Thika District have gradually been integrated into the capitalist economy and the consequences thereof. The study examines the specific context of relations and forces of production of the residents of Thika with a view to contextualizing poverty in the district. Besides the articulation of modes perspective, the empowerment model is employed in the study to gauge the extent to which groups at the periphery are involved in the development process.[54]

The study is based on both primary and secondary sources. Fieldwork for the study was undertaken in the period November 2001 and July 2002, and again in from January to August 2004. Both purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used. Chiefs and other government officers helped to identify key informants. Both structured and semi-structured questionnaires based on the research questions were used to gather information related to the experiences and perspectives of the poor and those who interact with them.[55] Through life histories and narratives, vital

[54] John Friedman, *Empowerment: The Politics of Alternative Development* (Cambridge, Mass: Blackwell, 1992).

[55] Narayan, *Voices of the Poor*, p.9.

ethnographic data was collected. Participant-observation also afforded the researcher insights into various manifestations of poverty. Photographs taken during the fieldwork helped capture the previously undocumented phenomenon of child labour, especially in stone quarries in the district.

Evidence from oral sources was supplemented by extensive archival and library research. Most of the archival data was obtained from a variety of government records such as annual, handing-over and intelligence reports. These documents contained invaluable information on census, labour, land, agriculture, co-operatives, health care, and so on. Other official documents like development plans, economic surveys, statistical abstracts and reports from various commissions provided vital information.

The study covers the period 1953 – 2000 because the initial Thika District was created in the former year while Kenya prepared the Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (IPRSP) in the latter year. This time frame allows us to examine the dynamics of poverty in the district over a period of nearly fifty years.

CHAPTER ONE

THIKA IN THE CONTEXT OF KENYA'S POLITICAL ECONOMY

Kenya's socio-economic development, like that of other parts of Africa, has been extensively influenced by ethnic politics. In post-colonial Africa, ethnic mobilisation remains an important aspect of the politics of patrimonialism. There are two broad approaches to ethnicity: primordialism and the constructivism. Primordalists claim that ethnicity is created and shaped by historic, cultural, social, psychological and biological realities, while constructivists view ethnicity as a social construct. To the latter group, ethnicity is a choice made by individuals in pursuit of wealth, prestige and power.[1] Whatever its origins, ethnicity influences relations between people and can bring about acceptance or exclusion, depending on the interests at stake.[2] It thus remains a strong influence for identity formation and social action. This study draws on Mamdani's constructivist notion that views ethnicity as something immutable and always in the 'making'.[3]

Ethnicity in modern Africa has its origins in the structures and practices of the colonial state.[4] In particular, the divide-and-rule tactics of the colonial state characterized by the imposition of arbitrary national and sub-national boundaries laid the basis for ethnic thinking in Africa. The British colony of Kenya, for example, was divided into provinces that were subdivided into districts. In most cases, districts were ethnic enclaves. Consequently, the nationalism that emerged during the anti-colonial struggle in Kenya and elsewhere in Africa fizzled out once political independence was attained. The political parties that spearheaded the brief anti-colonial struggles were

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[1] Pierre van den Berghe, *The Ethnic Phenomenon* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press Inc., 1981), p. 2; John Hutchinson, and Anthony Smith, (eds.) *Ethnicity* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 84.

[2] Quoted in Thomas Spear and Richard Waller (eds.), *Being Maasai: Ethnicity and Identity in East Africa* (London: James Currey, 1993), p. 15.

[3] Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 185.

[4] Bruce Berman, 'Ethnicity, Patronage and the African State: The Politics of Uncivil Nationalism', *African Affairs*, 97, 388 (1998), p. 324.

rarely able to maintain their mobilisation capacity after independence.[5] Kenya's case clearly demonstrates how ethnicity has replaced ideology in the struggle for control of state resources during the past four decades.[6] Consequently ethnic inequality and poverty have characterized life in Kenya and elsewhere in Africa. In this study, poverty in Thika District is viewed as a reflection of the politics of patrimonialism.

Broadly defined, patrimonialism means that political authority depends on informal systems of clientism based on ethnicity and friendship. Consequently, state action in respect to people outside the network of the governing elite becomes unpredictable. This makes exclusion and inclusion key concepts in patronage politics.

The political history of Thika District is intertwined with that of the Kenyatta family. Formerly a division within Kiambu District, Thika was home to Kenya's first president, Mzee Jomo Kenyatta. President Kenyatta was the first Member of Parliament (MP) for Gatundu Constituency, which became the focus of state resources. After the death of Kenyatta in August 1978, his nephew, Ngengi Muigai, succeeded him as the MP for Gatundu, while Peter Muigai, Kenyatta's son, was the MP for Juja/Thika Constituency from as far back as in 1974. After Muigai's death in 1983, he was succeeded by Kenyatta's brother in-law, George Muhoho, who served until 1991 when he resigned owing to turmoil within the Kenya National Union (KANU), which was then the ruling party. In 2003, Kenyatta's son, Uhuru, was elected the MP for part of his father's former constituency, Gatundu South Constituency.[7]

Contrary to the popular belief that residents of Kiambu District benefitted from state largesse during the Kenyatta era, the history of the district illustrates how the politics

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[5] Zolberg quoted in Nicolas van de Walle, *African Economies and the Politics of Permanent Crisis 1979-1999* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 115, 116.

[6] Elisha Atieno-Odhiambo, 'Hegemonic Enterprises and Instrumentalists of Survival: Ethnicity and Democracy in Kenya', *African Studies*, 61, 2 (2002), pp. 225, 241.

[7] *Daily Nation*, 23 April 2005.

of patrimonialism impoverished the district's residents.[8] The situation was exacerbated by shift in political power after Kenyatta's death, making Thika District one of the most marginal areas in the Kenya. This had to do with a realignment in national politics during the Moi era (1978 – 2002). President Daniel arap Moi, Kenyatta's successor, systematically intervened in local political processes with a view to dislodging existing forces and alliances while constituting new ones.[9]

It is noteworthy that the present Thika District was carved out of Kiambu District in 1994. From 1953 to 1963, Thika existed as a white settler enclave for coffee and sisal farming in the midst of the Kikuyu native reserve. At independence in 1963, Thika District was dissolved and the area put under the jurisdiction of Murang'a and Kiambu districts with the Chania River as the boundary.[10] This was followed by a number of administrative changes that culminated in the recreation of a new Thika District in 1994.[11] Thika has therefore been at the centre of the politics of both Kiambu and Murang'a districts besides its association with the Kenyatta family.[12]

Owing to lack of disaggregated data on Thika District, this study refers to either Kiambu or Thika districts as appropriate. This is, particularly apparent in the current chapter. Indeed, ten years after the creation of Thika District, some official documents still designated Thika as part of Kiambu District.

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[8] Joel Barkan, *et al.* 'Decentralization and Democratization in Sub-Saharan Africa' (Occasional Papers 45 - 49, International Programs, University of Iowa, 1998), p. 3.

[9] Karuti Kanyinga, 'Ethnicity, Patronage and Class in a Local Arena: "High" and "Low" Politics in Kiambu, Kenya, 1982-92' in Karuti Kanyinga, Andrew Kiondo and Per Tidemand (eds.) *The New Local Level Politics in East Africa* (Stockholm: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, Research Paper No. 95, 1994), p. 89.

[10] Geoff Lamb, *Peasant Politics in Kenya* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1974), p. 50.

[11] Republic of Kenya (RoK), *Kiambu District Development Plan 1974-78* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1974), p. 7.

[12] Patricia Stamp, 'Governing Thika: Dilemmas of Municipal Politics in Kenya' (Ph.D. Thesis, University of London, 1980), p. 269.

This chapter, which situates the study area in its geo-political and historical context, is divided into three sections. The first section traces the peopling and early history of Thika District while the second focuses on colonial encroachment. The last section examines the place of Thika in the politics of patrimonialism in independent Kenya.

The Historical Geography of Thika District

This study is based on research carried out in Thika District, which is located 40 kilometres northeast of Nairobi. Thika is one of the seven districts of the Central Province of Kenya. It borders Nairobi Municipality to the south, Kiambu District to the west, Maragwa District to the north and Machakos District to the east. The district has six administrative divisions (see Map 1) and had a population of 645, 713 in 1999, with a population density of 329 persons per square kilometre.[13] Table 1.1 shows the population distribution and density in the various divisions.

Table 1.1: Thika District Population Distribution and Density in 2001[14]

Division	Males	Females	Total	Density
Gatanga	50,109	52,939	103,048	430
Gatundu	54,277	59,422	113,699	750
Kakuzi	36,321	35,301	71,622	151
Kamwangi	47,941	51,519	99,460	409
Thika Municipality	56,236	50,938	107,174	386
Ruiru	78,595	72,115	150,710	193
Total	32,3479	322,234	645,713	322

Gatundu, Gatanga and Kamwangi divisions had the highest population density. This may be attributed to their close proximity to Thika Municipality, the major urban and

[13] Ministry of Planning and National Development, *1999 Population and Housing Census,* vol. i (Nairobi: January 2001), p. xxxiii.

[14] RoK, Thika *District Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 2001), p. 6.

industrial area in the district as well as a focal point for job-seekers. Historically these divisions constituted part of the Kikuyu Native Reserve, which was heavily populated during the colonial period in contrast to the Kakuzi and Ruiru, which were part of the White Highlands.

Thika District is primarily inhabited by the Kikuyu, a branch of the eastern Bantu communities that inhabit the Mount Kenya region.[15] According to Muriuki, proto-Bantu migrants settled in the Mount Kenya region during the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. By the latter century, the Kikuyu had effectively occupied the area between the south Chania and Nairobi areas. This study is concerned with the Kikuyu who settled between the Chania and Nairobi rivers in what is the present-day Thika District. In the process of occupying the area, the Kikuyu encountered resistance from Maasai and Athi groups who already occupied the area. Consequently, many battles were fought around what is now Thika town.[16] The place therefore earned the name *thika*, the Kikuyu word for bury, following the killings that took place in the area.[17]

Kikuyu occupation of Thika was characterised by negotiation of new social relationships and redefinition of old ones.[18] The process of acquisition of land was symptomatic of this social flexibility. Land formed a social bond and shaped both the social and the moral fabric of Kikuyuland.[19] Through marriage, trade and blood

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[15] The other eastern Bantu groups in the Mount Kenya region are the Embu, Chuka, Tharaka, Mbeere and Meru.

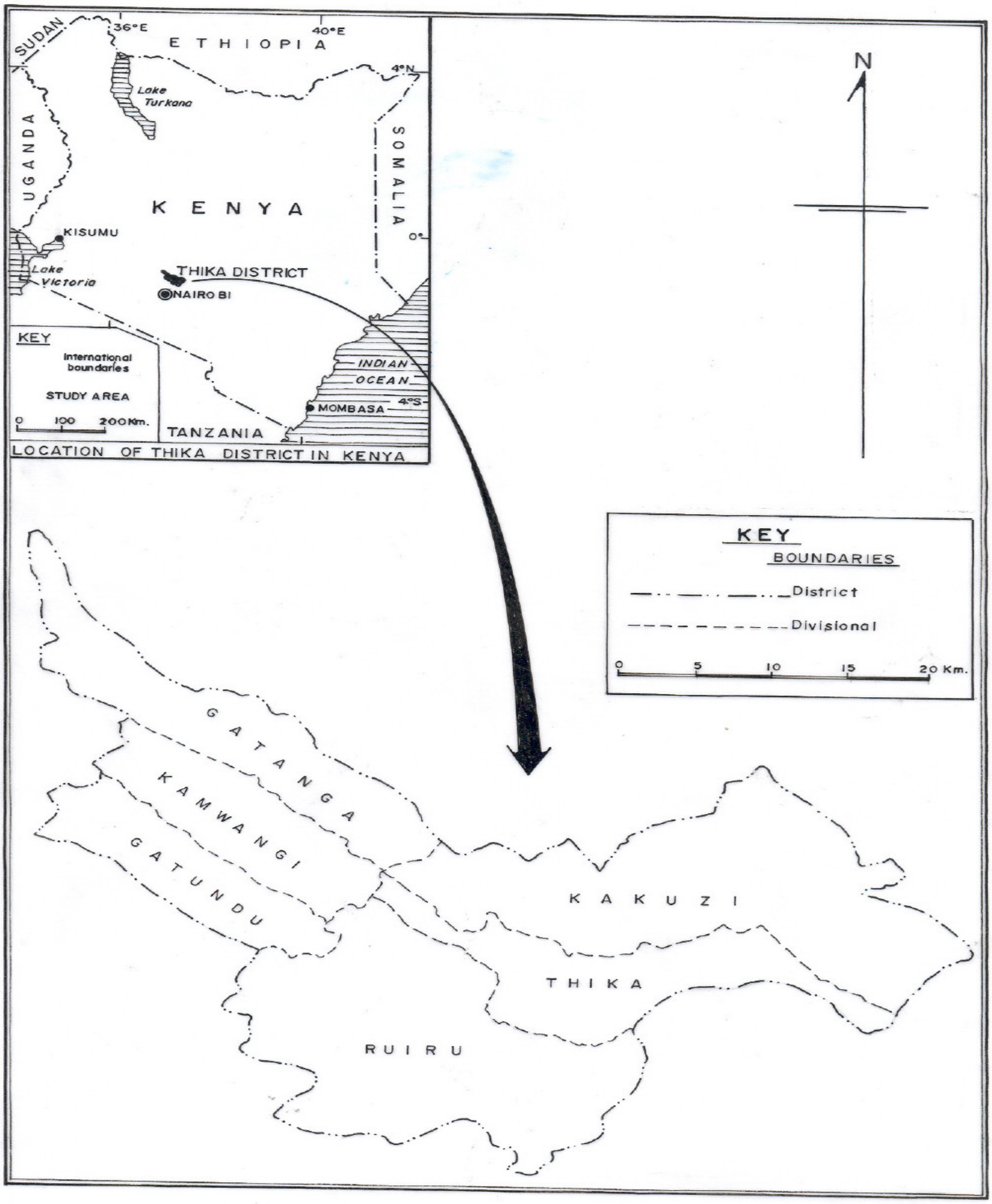
[16] Godfrey Muriuki, *A History of the Kikuyu 1500-1900* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 72.

[17] Karuga Wandai, *Thika Leaders* (Thika: Mount Kilimanjaro Publishers, 1989), p. 8.

[18] Charles Ambler, *Kenyan Communities in the Age of Imperialism: The Central Region in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 32.

[19] Richard Waller, ‘Acceptees and Aliens: Kikuyu in Maasailand’, in Spear, *Being Maasai*, p. 229.

Map 1: Location of Thika District in Kenya and the Administrative Boundaries in 2002



Source: RoK, *Thika District Development Report 2002-2008* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 2002), pp. 3, 8.

brotherhood arrangements, land rights were obtained. Absolute cases of people in need of land did not exist or were kept to the bare minimum.[20] Whereas in the area around Gatundu the Kikuyu acquired land through first clearance rights as they migrated south of River Ruiru, land was acquired from the Athi in exchange for goats.[21] However, occupation of land by the Kikuyu in the Thika area had not been completed by the time of colonial intrusion, which disrupted the settlement of the Kikuyu in what became southern Kikuyuland (see chapter two).

The Colonial Period, 1895 - 1963

Kenya became a British sphere of influence in 1888 under the administration of the Imperial British East Africa Company (IBEAC). However, the under-capitalised company did little to develop the large territory at its disposal. It was not until Kenya came under the direct control of the British government in 1895 that the impact of colonialism began to be felt throughout the territory.[22]

From the outset, colonial administrators considered Kenya a territory that was to be developed into a white man's country and Europeans were encouraged to migrate into the country. This attracted immigrants who were favoured by the state through mechanisms such as land alienation for settlement as well as settler-friendly labour and taxation policies. In 1902, for example, the first Crown Lands Ordinance allowed the colonial authority to issue settlers with ninety-nine year leases on land that had been designated crown (state) land. Such leases were extended to 999 years in 1915.[23] The area that came to be known as the White Highlands was set aside exclusively for the European settlers while Africans were confined to the land units known as native

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20 Muriuki, *A History of the Kikuyu*, pp. 74, 75.

21 M. P. K. Sorrenson, *Land Reform in the Kikuyu Country: A Study in Government Policy* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1967), p.7.

22 Bruce Berman, *Control and Crisis in Colonial Kenya: The Dialectic of Domination* (London: James Currey, 1990), p. 52.

23 *Ibid*, p. 56.

reserves. Colonial authorities also did everything in its power to provide the settlers with infrastructure and a constant supply of African labour.

The colonial intrusion coincided with the ecological crisis of the 1890s. The Kikuyu, who were still reeling from the effects of cattle and human diseases as well as concomitant famine, were unable to resist colonial intrusion. In response to the ecological calamities, the Kiambu Kikuyu retreated northwards to the area near Chania River, leaving the recently acquired territories vacant.[24] The ecological catastrophes depleted Kikuyu population to the extent that the administration of East Africa Protectorate (Kenya) considered Kikuyuland empty land that was available for European occupation. In some cases, however, Kikuyu families and *mbari* (clans) were moved from their land in order to make way for white settlement.[25]

The fertile land in the Thika area attracted the white settlers who transformed it into coffee and sisal plantations. By the early 1910s, most of the land in the area had been alienated for European settlement. Among the chief casualties of land alienation were the Anjiru and Ambui clans who occupied the land between the Chania and Ruiru rivers. These lineages paved the way for, *inter alia,* the establishment of Kibozi, Kiaora, Dunmottar, Gulmac, Kiu River Farm, Kahawa, Kamiti Downs, Mayfield and Manbre estates.[26] For example, the *Anjiru a Mbari* ya *Takinya* and *Ambui a Mbari ya Aigi,* who occupied the land between Chania and Kariminu Rivers in present-day Kamwangi Division, lost their land to the White Sisters of Mang'u and Bob Harries, the latter being a pioneer coffee, sisal and pineapple farmer in Thika District.[27] The two clans suffered the loss of communal grazing land as well as salt licks while their crop production was interrupted by the new land-owners. Land alienation denied these communities socio-economic development opportunities and sowed the seeds of poverty in the area. The former independent producers were only allowed to continue

24 Michael Blundell, *So Rough a Wind: The Memoirs of Blundell Michael* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1964), p. 31.

25 Muriuki, *A History of the Kikuyu*, p.173.

26 Kenya Colony and Protectorate, *Memoranda and Evidence* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1933).

27 KNA/PC/CP/9/8/15: Central Province Annual Report 1930.

living on land that was not immediately required by the settlers as squatters (tenants) who provided labour to them.

Deprived of a livelihood, many Kikuyu families migrated to the Rift Valley where they became squatters on settler farms. Although a lot of land in Thika was set aside for settler farming, some *mbari,* for instance the Mutego lineage in Mitero Village of Kamwangi Division, retained their land.[28] Large coffee estates were established in southeastern parts of the district while the northwestern parts formed the bulk of the Kikuyu native reserve, which became an important labour reserve. The living and working conditions of different categories of workers in the district are covered in chapters five and six.

Fearing further colonial encroachment in the reserves, the Kikuyu demanded titles to their plots from as early as 1914. The colonial government however resisted these pressures, arguing that the Kikuyu land tenure system of communal ownership protected them from ‘excessive acquisition of land by individuals’.[29] Nonetheless, irredeemable sale of land among the Kiambu Kikuyu was in practice as early as 1905. Furedi notes that European settlers were not the only ones who took land from the Kikuyu as Kikuyu *athomi* (elite) were also clearing former dependents and tenants (*ahoi*) from their land by 1905.[30] By the 1930s the idea of private ownership, combined with outright sale and purchase of land (irredeemable sale), had proved detrimental to poor *mbari* members who lost land to the politically and economically influential elites.[31] Subsequently, *mbari* stability was shaken as class interests

[28] Patricia Stamp, ‘Kikuyu Women’s Self-Help Groups: Towards an Understanding of the Relation Between Sex-Gender System and Mode of Production in Africa’, in Claire Robertson and Iris Berger (eds.), *Women and Class in Africa* (New York: African Publishing House, 1986), p. 39.

[29] Kenya Colony and Protectorate, *Kenya Land Commission: Memoranda and Evidence* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1933).

[30] Frank Furedi, *The Mau Mau War in Perspective* (London: James Currey, 1989), p. 6.

[31] Gavin Kitching, *Class and Economic Change in Kenya: The Making of an African Petite Bourgeoisie 1905-1970* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1980), p. 292.

transcended those of the lineage.[32] In other words, claims of junior kin and non-kin dependents were overlooked, leading to strife and conflicts between *mbari* members. Subsequently, the language of class was employed and there were indications that communities were experiencing social stratification. This contrasts with the pre-colonial process of land acquisition that ensured that all had access to land as a guarantee to a livelihood. By the 1930s, social harmony among the Kiambu Kikuyu was on the verge of collapse.

An increase in land litigations and related problems culminated in the formation of the Carter Land Commission in 1932 to look into land problems in the Kenya. Evidence presented by the people living in Thika and Kiambu districts showed that besides the land that had been alienated for white settlement, the elite had appropriated as much as 100 acres by squeezing the rest of society into less than five acres per household.[33] The commission also learned that some parts of the Kikuyu reserve were overcrowded and badly eroded. To solve these issues, the commission recommended land redistribution. In response to the commission's recommendations, the government added blocks of land to native reserves. In Kikuyuland, the government considered individual or *mbari* claims alongside loss of land by the community and initiated resettlement schemes on marginal areas such as Ndeiya and Karai in Kiambu District.[34]

Increased pressure on land led to marginalisation of the poorer sections of the Kikuyu, particularly the *ahoi* (Kikuyu for tenants-at-will) who lived on other household's land. Congestion in the reserves was compounded by the return of ex-squatters evicted from white farms in the Rift Valley Province in the late 1930s. The resultant insecurity and anxiety led to increase in conflicts such as lawsuits that turned family against family. By 1950, the native tribunals (courts) and the provincial administration were overwhelmed by land cases. The appointment of special native

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32 Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya and Africa: Book One: State and Class,* (London: James Currey 1992), p. 301.

33 Kenya Colony, *Kenya Land Commission*, p. 78.

34 *Ibid*., p. 24.

court officers in Central and Nyanza provinces was one of the measures taken by the colonial state to resolve the crisis.[35] The precarious land situation in Kikuyuland culminated in the struggle for land and political independence that came to be known as Mau Mau.[36] Though the Kikuyu initiated struggle for a return of the 'stolen' lands and independence, other ethnic groups in the country joined the struggle in time.[37]

On the eve of independence in the early 1960s, the main ethnic groups in Kenya, notably the Kikuyu and the Luo, formed the Kenya African National Union (KANU) while the minority groups, mainly from the Coast, Rift Valley and Western provinces, formed the Kenya African Democratic Union (KADU) to counter possible domination by the former. Ethnic mobilisation therefore predated the establishment of the independent Kenyan state.

Patrimonialism during the Kenyatta Era, 1963 – 1978

In 1963, KANU won the elections that marked Kenya's transition from a colony to an independent state. Consequently, Jomo Kenyatta, the leader of KANU became the prime minister before becoming the president when Kenya became a republic in 1964. Fearing socio-economic marginalization of their areas, KADU politicians crossed the floor in parliament and joined KANU in government in 1964, thus making Kenya a *de facto* single-party state.

In 1965, the government published the Sessional *Paper No. 10 on African Socialism and its Application to Planning in Kenya* as the country's *e*conomic blueprint. The

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35 Kitching, *Class and Economic Change in Kenya*, p.326.

36 Mau Mau refers to the anti-state struggle mounted by Kenyans against British colonialism in the 1950s.

37 See Tabitha Kanogo, *Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau 1905-63* (Oxford: James Currey, 1987); David Throup, *Economic and Social Origins of Mau Mau* (Oxford: James Currey: 1987); Furedi, *Mau Mau War in Perspective;* Wanyubari Maloba, *Mau Mau and Kenya: An Analysis of a Peasant Revolt* (Bloomington Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1993) and Greet Kershaw, *Mau Mau from Below* (London: James Currey, 1997).

paper talked of the need to reorganize Kenya's socio-economic structures with a view to attacking poverty, disease and ignorance – then considered legacies of colonialism – with a view to achieving social justice, human dignity and economic wellbeing for all.[38] According to the proponents of African socialism, Kenya had rejected both capitalism and communism in favour of an authentically African strategy to socio-economic development. Politically, African socialism entailed a policy of non-alignment with neither the capitalist West nor the communist East. However, the difference between the theory and practice of African socialism in independent Kenya has been pronounced as is evident in the remainder of this chapter.

Many Kenyans viewed Kenyatta as a symbol of national unity. For the Kikuyu he was the reincarnation of Gikuyu, the legendary patriarch of the community: the Adam of the Kikuyu. As far as the other ethnic groups were concerned, he was the one who seemed to stand above tribalism. For other races, he was simply *mzee* (a Kiswahili word that loosely means 'father of the nation').[39]

On assuming power, however, Kenyatta surrounded himself with sons of the former colonial chiefs. This group of proto-capitalists were the first to acquire modern education. They therefore became the governing elite in the Kenyatta era and were in two groups, the inner and outer 'cabinets'. The inner or kitchen 'cabinet' comprised Kikuyu people, especially those who came from Kenyatta's native Kiambu, also known as the 'Kiambu Kikuyu establishment'.[40] These included Mbiyu Koinange, the minister of state in the office of the president and Kenyatta's brother-in-law; James Gichuru, minister of defence; Njoroge Mungai, minister of foreign affairs and one-time Kenyatta personal physician; and Charles Njonjo, the attorney general. This 'cabinet', which was drawn from Kenyatta's friends and advisers, was responsible for the day-to-day running of government and operated from Kenyatta's lineage home in

[38] RoK, *Sessional Paper No. 10 on African Socialism and its Application to Planning in Kenya* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1965), p. 1.

[39] Jeremy Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1972), p. 313.

[40] Hyden Goran, 'Party, State and Civil Society', in Joel Barkan (ed.), *Beyond Capitalism vs. Socialism in Kenya and Tanzania* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1994), p. 81.

Gatundu. It would appear as though there were 'two governments functioning in Kenya: the official one in Nairobi and the "real one" at Gatundu run by the Kikuyu inner caucus'.[41] The interests of this clique, also known as the "Kiambu mafia", superseded the national interest. None of those individuals in this 'cabinet' came from what is today Thika District, except Kenyatta himself.

Those in the outer 'cabinet' included Mwai Kibaki, minister of finance; Duncan Ndegwa, governor of central bank; Gikonyo Kiano, minister for local government; Jeremiah Nyagah, minister of agriculture; and Jackson Angaine, minister of lands and settlement. Membership of this 'cabinet' was drawn mainly from the Gikuyu, Embu and Meru Association (hereafter GEMA). This 'cabinet' did not have as much access to the president as its counterpart. Between 1963 and 1978, GEMA accounted for an average of 29 percent of cabinet posts even though they comprised only 21 percent of Kenya's population.[42] It is therefore manifest that GEMA was a politically favoured group under the Kenyatta presidency.

Another feature of the Kenyatta regime was the domination of the civil service and public sector in general by members of GEMA. Such patronage gradually undermined Kenyatta's nationalist and populist credentials. More importantly, the patronage served to alienate Kenyatta from other Kenyan communities and even the non-Kiambu Kikuyu. Within two years of independence, ethnic cleavages had been consolidated and alignments had taken shape. The framework of an effective power bloc under the hegemony of a Kikuyu elite had been established. From 1966 onward, the state apparatus superintended a series of measures that rapidly enlarged the sphere and the rate of indigenous capital accumulation.

Although Kenyatta was an elected leader, he behaved as a monarch who facilitated the advancement of selfish ethnic and class interests. This contrasted what had been enunciated in *Sessional Paper No. 10* of 1965 that:

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[41] Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta*, p. 317.

[42] Karuti Kanyinga, 'Concentrated Multipolarity: Ghana, Kenya and India' in Yusuf Bangura (ed.) '*Ethnic Inequality and the Public Sector: A Comparative Study'* (Geneva: UNRISD, 2004), p.40.

> Each member of society is equal in his political rights and that no individual or group will be permitted to exert undue influence on the policies of the state. The state, therefore, can never become the tool of special interests, catering to the desires of a minority. The state will represent all of the people and will do so impartially and without prejudice.[43]

In short, ethnicity influenced allocation and distribution of state resources, particularly the provision of social amenities like education and health care. The Kenyatta government inordinately allocated national resources to favoured regions in the country while neglecting others. For example, in the period 1973 - 1978, Central Province received more than twice the resources it was supposed to receive for development projects relative to total population.[44] The relatively developed infrastructure in Kiambu District at the time reflected this disproportionate allocation of state resources. By 1984, for example, Kiambu District, a relatively small administrative area, had close to 500 miles of tarmac roads and 97 government secondary schools.[45]

In addition, Kiambu District led in the number of *harambee* (self-help) projects in the country during the Kenyatta era. The *harambee* movement encouraged local communities to participate in the development of social infrastructure such as schools, cattle dips, health centres, and coffee and tea factories with a view to bolstering socio-economic. The movement, an important aspect of African socialism, led Kenyatta to exhort local communities and their leaders to be self-reliant rather than depending wholly on the government for socio-economic development.[46] Although the movement was still in its infancy during the Kenyatta era, Kiambu District had an edge over other parts of the country in terms of the number and size of *harambee* projects.

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[43] RoK, *Sessional Paper No. 10*, p. 3.

[44] Arne Bigsten, *Regional Inequality and Development: A Case Study of Kenya* (Farnborough: Gower, 1980), p.156.

[45] RoK, *Kiambu, Elgeyo Marakwet and Siaya District Development Plans 1984-88* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1984).

[46] Michael Bratton and Nicolas van de Walle, *Democratic Experiments in Africa: Transition Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 186.

Kenyans frequently paid homage to *Mzee* Kenyatta in the time-honoured way at his Gatundu home. These visits to Gatundu were characterised by donations to one or the other of Kenyatta's favourite *harambee* projects like Mama Ngina Children's Home, Armed Forces Memorial Hospital and Gatundu Self-Help Hospital.[47] In the latter case, Kenyatta organised a national *harambee* even though the project was fully funded by the Kenya government.[48] Other projects included the Kiambu Institute of Science and Technology (KIST), Kiambu High School and Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT). In the latter case, Kenyatta's nephew, and future MP for Gatundu constituency, organised the *harambee* towards which the president himself donated Sh. 3,000.[49]

The expansion of the Thika District Hospital in the early 1970s is also associated with Kenyatta's self-help activities. Through a NOK 3.5 million grant from the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), the Kenya Government was able to construct a nutrition unit, lecture theatres and a casualty department at the district hospital.[50] From this and similar projects, it is clear that Kiambu District was receiving more government support than other areas in the country.

Kenyatta has been accused of abusing the *harambee* spirit on two accounts. First, it is alleged that most of the donations went to the Kenyatta family instead of the intended projects.[51] Second, the fact that the government took over the running of projects started by communities on self-help basis once the infrastructure was in place meant that the more projects a community established the more public resources it attracted. Kiambu District with its many *harambee* projects was therefore able to attract an unfair fair of public resources compared to other areas.[52] Gatundu Sub-district

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[47]Colin Leys, *Underdevelopment in Kenya: The Political Economy of Neo-Colonialism* (London: Heinemann, 1975), p. 249.

[48] KNA/AMC/14/7: Central Province, Annual Reports 1965 - 1969.

[49] *East African Standard*, 18 October 2004.

[50] KNA/BY/8/381: Thika District Hospital Annual Report 1970.

[51] Stamp, 'Governing Thika', p. 269.

[52] Brian Cooksey, David Court and Ben Makau, 'Education for Self-Reliance and Harambee' in Barkan, *Beyond Capitalism*, p. 206.

Hospital, for example, was better staffed and equipped than Kenyatta National Hospital, Kenya's premier referral hospital. The *harambee* movement therefore encouraged skewed development as well-to-do leaders and communities used it to initiate local projects that attracted state funding.[53]

Many *harambee* projects were started in Kenyatta's Gatundu Constituency and Kiambu District in general. No wonder Central Province is generally thought to have disproportionately benefitted from state resources in the 1960s and 1970s. To some extent this is true as Kenyatta's African socialism was more rhetoric than real because as his government tended to favour the Kikuyu in relation to other Kenyans.[54] In Kenyatta's Kenya, the Kikuyu benefitted from state patronage while other communities received the least patronage necessary to retain their loyalty. It is on record that Kenyatta believed the Kikuyu were entitled to a larger share of state resources.[55] But the Kikuyu are not homogenous; there exists regional differences among the Kikuyu of Kiambu, Murang'a and Nyeri. During the Kenyatta era, the lower echelons of the Kikuyu elite in Nyeri and Murang'a accumulated mainly from the crumbs that fell from the table of the Kiambu elite.[56] This becomes clearer as we delve into the succession politics that plagued the country in the mid-1970s.

Besides engineering skewed development in the country through abuse of the *harambee* spirit, the Kenyatta government was infamous for high-level corruption. Kenyatta's cronies in the civil service engaged in the wanton plunder of state resources.[57] Kenyatta himself was accused of corruption and he seemed to have

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[53] *Ibid.* p. 211.

[54] *The Times*, 23 August 1978; Henry Bienen, *Kenya: The Politics of Participation and Control* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 137.

[55] Joel Barkan and Michael Chege, 'Decentralising the State: District Focus and the Politics of Reallocation in Kenya', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 27, 3 (1989), p. 437.

[56] Kanyinga, 'Ethnicity, Patronage and Class', p. 98.

[57] *Time*, 28 May 1969.

regarded this as a *droit de seigneur* (the right of the lord).[58] The regime used illegal means to appropriate public property for the enrichment of a few people. The process of land distribution in Thika District, for example, illuminates how the Kenyatta family and close allies engaged in a breakneck accumulation of land and acquired vast tracts of land in the larger Kiambu District.[59]

Being in power, the Kikuyu elite were able to mobilise state resources for their own benefit during the Kenyatta era. The principle of comparative advantage provided a compelling economic rationale for policies that delivered the greater share of the country's agro-economic resources and inputs to the wealthier, export-oriented farmers of the Central Province.[60] Kenya's coffee and tea producers formed a politically privileged economic stratum, one that enjoyed access to services and facilities provided by the government. In particular, they enjoyed complete freedom to organise and manage their own affairs under the broad mantle of friendly governmental supervision.[61] The Kenyatta government allowed these producers a high degree of institutional and associational autonomy.

The main agricultural institutions in Kenya were in the hands of the Kikuyu elite during the Kenyatta era. These included the Kenya Farmers Association (KFA), an umbrella agriculture corporation that purchased fertilisers, pesticides and machinery in bulk for distribution to farmers; the Kenya Coffee Growers Association (KCGA), a planters' body that represented the interests of coffee farmers; the Kenya Planters Co-operative Union (KPCU), a national coffee farmers' union that borrowed money and normally paid farmers even before selling coffee parchment; and the Agricultural Finance Corporation (AFC), which disbursed loans to farmers through their primary co-operative societies. Extant evidence shows that most of the institutions were

58 *Time,* 24 August 1982.

59 Diana Hunt, *The Impending Crisis in Kenya: The Case for Land Reform* (Aldershot: Gower 1984), p. 288.

60 Michael Lofchie, 'The Politics of Agricultural Policy' in Barkan, *Beyond Capitalism*, p. 160.

61 *Ibid.*

efficiently run and posted huge profits in the pre-1979 period which benefitted mainly the Kikuyu.[62]

During the first decade of independence, Kenya also experienced impressive growth in the industrial sector. The implementation of the policy of 'Africanisation', variously referred to as 'Kenyanisation', 'indigenisation' or 'localisation', was partly responsible the growth. The 'Africanisation' programme involved the transfer of ownership of commercial and industrial enterprises from non-Kenyans to Kenyans. Funds for the programme were provided through the Industrial and Commercial Development Corporation (ICDC) and International Development Bank (IDB).[63] In Thika, money was disbursed through the Kiambu District Joint Loans Board and the Municipal Council of Thika (MCT) Loans Committee. The loans catered for local artisans and small traders as well as industrialists, and were used to expand existing businesses, buy commercial buildings from non-Africans and construct light industries. Kikuyu traders in Thika District mainly engaged in hardware and milling businesses while a few joined the Asians in the textile industry. Africans, particularly the Kikuyu, acquired ownership of most of the commercial enterprises in Thika town and by 1976 only one engineering business in the town belonged to a non-Kenyan.[64] Some of the African-owned businesses included the Munene and Waka Industries, Thika General Workshop and Polysack.

During the 1970s and 1980s more textile, automobile and chemical industries were established in Thika town. These included the Kenya Vehicle Manufacturers (KVM), a British American Tobacco (BAT) Limited processing plant, Kensara, Bhupco Limited and Kenblest. Textile industries were the most numerous and were a major source of employment. Among the leading textile plants was the state-owned Kenya Textile Mills (KTM). The factory provided employment as well as trading

[62] Barbara Grosh, *Public Enterprise in Kenya: What Works, What Doesn't and Why* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1991), pp.82-87.

[63] Nicola Swainson, *The Development of Corporate Capitalism in Kenya* (New York: Heinemann, 1980), p. 180.

[64] KNA/AMC/14/9: Thika/Gatundu Division Annual Reports 1974-80.

opportunities for many people in the district.[65] The existence of backward and forward linkages between industries contributed to the improvement of livelihoods of the people in the area. By 1978, Thika town was third after Nairobi and Mombasa in terms of industrial development.[66]

Under the aegis of 'Kenyanisation', trade in the town was 'Africanised' and most industries appointed African distributors. To reinforce these efforts the district Management Trading and Advisory Centre organised training for the traders at the Salvation Army Framers Training Centre and Gatundu Police Canteen in the district. Africans were continuously encouraged to enter into import and export trade as well as manufacturing with favourable results. During the period 1973 - 1980, African-owned businesses in Thika town rose from 80 to 99 percent.[67] In time, the Kikuyu effectively penetrated commerce and industry in the town, shattering Asian hegemony in these areas. In other towns in Thika District such as Gatundu, Juja and Ruiru, manufacturing plants were also established. The latter particularly witnessed a remarkable proliferation of industries in the early 1980s, which had ripple effects on the district's economy in general.[68] The proliferation of factories in the district constituted a main source of employment to people from different parts of the country (see chapter seven).

Allocation of resources through the parastatals mentioned above followed ethnic patterns during the Kenyatta era. In 1964, for example, the Kikuyu, who formed 20 percent of the male population in Kenya, received 64 percent of industrial and 44 percent of commercial loans.[69] The better connected elements within the elite were

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[65] RoK, Thika Division Ministry of Commerce and Industry Department of Internal Trade 1983.

[66] RoK, *Economic Survey 1982* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1982), p.42.

[67] RoK, Various Annual Reports.

[68] KNA/AMC/14/9: Thika Division Annual Reports 1974 - 1980.

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[69] Quoted in Donald Rothchild, 'Ethnic Inequalities in Kenya', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 7, 4 (1969), p. 693.

able to secure large proportions of state resources for expansion of their enterprises.[70] Kiambu Kikuyu elite therefore used state institutions to consolidate its economic interests.

In addition, the ruling elite used their land and other assets as collateral to acquire loans for commercial and industrial projects (see chapter two). Their influence was within and outside the country. The beneficiaries included a class of capitalists that established linkages with foreign capital and used close family relationships with Kenyatta to build their business empires.[71] During the 1960s and 1970s the Kiambu elite accumulated company directorships and the means to embark on careers as capitalist entrepreneurs in their own right.[72] In addition, members of the Kiambu elite were appointed to boards of directors or other positions that allowed them to receive "commissions" from newly launched enterprises.

It is clear from the foregoing discussion that through the strategy of Africanisation, budding entrepreneurs entrenched themselves in Central Province. But this did not breed a national bourgeoisie as most of those who benefitted from the programme were mainly Kenyatta's kin and the loyal followers who were able to take advantage of growing opportunities in the private sector.

Among the Kiambu District bourgeoisie who mushroomed and blossomed under Kenyatta's patronage were John Udi Gecaga (Kenyatta's son-in-law), Peter Muigai (Kenyatta's brother), Ngengi Muigai (Kenyatta's nephew) and Njenga Karume (chairman of GEMA). Gecaga, for example, was appointed managing director of Lonrho East Africa, the biggest foreign conglomeration then operating in Kenya.[73] By 1975, the commanding heights of business in Kenya were in the hands of the Kenyatta's relatives.[74] Although Peter Muigai distanced himself from foreign capital,

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[70] Arthur Hazlewood, *The Economy of Kenya: The Kenyatta Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 158.

[71] Swainson, *The Development of Corporate Capitalism,* pp. 212 - 221.

[72] Kanyinga, 'Ethnicity, Patronage and Class', p. 98.

[73] Hyden, 'Party, State and Civil Society', p. 85.

[74] *Sunday Times*, 24 August 1975.

his company, Mackenzie Dalgety (Kenya) remained the main supplier of agricultural inputs to coffee farmers in Thika and Kiambu districts throughout the 1970s.[75] The history of Thika and that of the Kenyattas family is highly intertwined. The dominance of the Kenyatta family in Thika's political economy and impoverishment of the masses form an integral part of this work as is apparent in chapters two through eight.

Kenyatta's critics contend that whereas the Kikuyu officially constituted about one-fifth of Kenya's population in 1979, they were economically and politically dominant under Kenyatta's beneficence. The means through which most Kikuyu acquired their wealth remained questionable.[76] To most people, Kenyatta's personal style made it appear as though the old colonial power was given a 'facelift' so that Kenyatta became a new style governor while the Kikuyu took up the place of the former white elite.[77] There is also evidence that the Kikuyu elite invested heavily in education and related opportunities, thereby taking advantage of opportunities that independence afforded them.[78] Some people however think that notion of Kikuyu dominance of the state during the Kenyatta era is exaggerated.[79] It is however a fact that Kikuyu elite accumulated capital during the Kenyatta era because they were in an advantageous position in relation to other Kenyans.

Throughout the Kenyatta era, the Kiambu Kikuyu could boast of being at the centre of economic progress in Kenya. However, the divisions of Kiambu District fared differently in terms of wealth acquisition. Thika town, for example, experienced fast development while the rural areas remained relatively undeveloped. The policy of Africanisation based on the politics of patrimonialism mainly benefitted those close to Kenyatta. Similarly, areas closely associated with Kenyatta like Gatundu Division

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[75] KNA/MR/3/44: Gatukuyu Coffee Co-operative Society 1983-84.

[76] Angelique Haugerud, *The Culture of Politics in Modern Kenya* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p.39.

[77] Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta*, p.315.

[78] Cooksey, 'Education for Self-Reliance and Harambee', p.206.

[79] Bienen, *Kenya*, pp. 130, 131.

were more developed than the rest of Kiambu District during the Kenyatta era. However, Kenyatta was not concerned about the poor whom he dismissed as lazy. This point is elaborated in the next, which highlights how Kenyatta dismissed the debate on land redistribution and used land 'handouts' to neutralise opponents, thereby fanning the political patronage.

From the foregoing it is apparent that the main beneficiaries of the Kenyatta regime were his family, friends and allies. But while this clique enjoyed a disproportionate share of state resources, the ordinary residents of Thika District benefitted little other than from infrastructural development in their area. It is this marginalised section of Thika residents that we are concerned with in this thesis.

The fact that some parts of Thika District have chronically been deprived of state resources has not spared residents of those areas sentiments aimed at all Kikuyu, irrespective of their status, for presumably monopolizing *matunda ya uhuru* (fruits of independence) during the Kenyatta era.[80] Residents of the marginalized areas in the district have had to pay for the sins of the Kenyatta regime. Other Kenyan communities, particularly the Luo, have blamed their marginalisation and exclusion from the national cake on the Kikuyu. By 1969, for example, there was mounting resentment among Kenyan communities, led by the Luo, of consolidation of economic and political power in the hands of hegemonic Kikuyu ruling elite.[81] This shocked Kenyatta's clique, which sought refuge in the Kikuyu community. For instance, following the assassination of Tom Mboya (a Luo who was considered a key threat to the Kenyatta regime) in 1969, the government orchestrated an oath taking ceremony to mobilise all the Kikuyu, irrespective of their class, to rally behind the Kenyatta regime in countering a presumed Luo threat.[82] This was repeated again in

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[80] *Ibid*, p.90; Tamarkin, Mordecai, 'Charles Njonjo and Kenyan Politics', *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 3, 1 / 2 (1983/84), p.66; David Leonard, 'Class Formation and Agricultural Development' in Joel Barkan (ed.) *Politics and Public Policy in Kenya and Tanzania* (New York: Praeger, 1984), p.150 and Elisha Atieno-Odhiambo, 'The Production of History in Kenya: The Mau Mau Debate', *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 25, 2 (1991), pp.301, 306.

[81] Rok Ajulu, 'Politicised Ethnicity, Competitive Politics and Conflict in Kenya: A Historical Perspective', *African Studies*, 61, 2 (2002), p. 261.

[82] See Atieno-Odhiambo, 'The Production of History in Kenya', p.306.

1975 after the assassination of J. M. Kariuki, a diaspora Kikuyu who spoke for the oppressed masses. Again the Kikuyu were mobilised to take oaths whereby they vowed that the presidency would never cross the Chania River, that is, move from Kiambu to either of the other two Kikuyu districts. These two assassinations show how political leaders seek to invent and invoke ethnicity when their own political survival is threatened.

Patrimonialism under Moi, 1978 - 2002

Kenyatta died in 1978 and was succeeded as president by Daniel arap Moi, his vice-president for 12 years. Moi belongs to the Tugen community, a sub-group of the Kalenjin community.[83] As vice-president, Moi observed how Kenyatta's clientelist system was structured to serve the interests of the ruling elite. As indicated, Kenyatta's clientele comprised the Kiambu Kikuyu establishment, a clique of top bureaucrats and politicians, which regarded itself as the guardian of the Kenyatta regime as well as the guarantors of Kenya's social stability and economic prosperity. The 1976 'change-the-constitution movement' is illustrative of this point. Faced with the imminent demise of Kenyatta, this group instigated a debate aimed at amending a section of Kenya's constitution that allowed the vice-president to succeed the president on an acting capacity and organize elections to fill the post within ninety days.[84]

Although the change-the-constitution movement was a GEMA initiative, those who most vociferously sought to block Moi from succeeding Kenyatta were mainly from the latter's inner and outer cabinets. The only exceptions were Charles Njonjo and Mwai Kibaki, who belonged to the inner and outer cabinets respectively. Njonjo, the then Attorney General, used his office to scorch the debate by advising President Kenyatta against supporting it. This scuttled the debate, paving the way for a Moi

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[83] The Kalenjin community comprises the Kipsigis, Nandi, Pokot, Elgeyo, Marakwet, Keiyo, Tugen, Saboat and Terik sub-groups.

[84] C. J. Gertzel, Maure Goldscmidt and Donald Rothchild, *Government and Politics in Kenya: A Nation Building Text* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1969), p. 288.

presidency after Kenyatta's death.[85] Kibaki's support for Moi against the Kiambu elite reflected sectarian interests within the Kikuyu society.[86] It is against this background the strained relationship between the Kiambu elite and the Moi presidency should be viewed.

Upon assuming the presidency, Moi set about reducing the influence of GEMA, especially its leaders who had been closest to his predecessor. This took the form of deprofessionalisation of the civil service, the implementation of politics of decentralisation, state control of the *harambee* movement and the collapse of the economy which are examined in the rest of this chapter.

To legitimise his authority, just as his predecessor had done, Moi surrounded himself with a clique selected on the basis of friendship, kinship and ethnicity.[87] Recruitment to both the public and private sectors was premised on the new-fangled notion of "tribal balance" with its privileging of the Kalenjin, Maasai, Turkana and other previously 'neglected' communities. Moi intensified the replacement of the Kikuyu from the helm after an abortive *coup d'etat* in 1982 in which the Kikuyu were incriminated. Among the scapegoats for the *coup* were Kikuyu senior bureaucrats and politicians like Ben Gethi, the Commissioner of Police, and Njonjo. Many Kikuyu bureaucrats who had served under Kenyatta were sacked after the *coup* while others like Njonjo were publicly humiliated. Njonjo, then a senior politician, was accused of undermining the presidency and was arraigned before a judicial commission.[88] By 1983 Moi had retired most Kikuyu administrators and top civil servants and replaced them with members of the Kalenjin and other formerly 'neglected' communities.[89] Recruitment into government positions was not governed by competence but political

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[85] Kanyinga, 'Ethnicity, Patronage and Class', p. 99

[86] Tamarkin, 'Charles Njonjo and Kenyan Politics', p. 66.

[87] Richard Sandbrook, *The Politics of Africa's Economic Stagnation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 113.

[88] Tamarkin, 'Charles Njonjo and Kenyan Politics', pp. 71-2.

[89] Barkan, 'Decentralization and Democratization in Sub-Saharan Africa', pp.22, 23.

or ethnic connections.[90] Similarly, the Cabinet was filled with those Moi's cronies. Between 1978 and 2002, the Kalenjin occupied 14 percent of cabinet posts though they made up only 12 percent of the Kenya's population.[91]

Having established a civil service that was loyal to him, President Moi introduced the politics of decentralisation. Decentralisation is defined as the transfer of legal and political authority from the central government and its agencies to local or grassroot organisations and institutions.[92] In 1983 the District Focus for Rural Development (DFRD, hereafter District Focus) strategy was launched. Under the auspices of this strategy, the district became the operational unit for planning, implementation and management of rural development. Ideally this was expected to transfer authority to districts and facilitate participation of rural communities in the identification and implementation of projects. District Development Committees (DDCs) were set up as the main units for spearheading socio-economic development in districts. Members of the DDCs included the District Commissioner (DC) as the chairman, District Development Officers (DDOs) and other government officers from both the local and central government. The central government provided grants to districts through the Rural Development Fund (RDF). Maintenance of feeder roads, water supplies, construction of community centres and health clinics, as well as the initiation of income-generation projects, were some of the projects sponsored by the RDF.

To ensure equitable distribution of national resources, budgetary allocations were to be proportional to the population living in each district. This precautionary measure was taken to discourage the disproportionate allocation of resources to ethno-regional bases as was the case in the Kenyatta era. But while this was the case on paper, it was different in practice. In the next section, we focus on the factors that hampered the realisation of the ideals of decentralisation, paying particular focus to Thika District.

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[90] John Cohen, 'Importance of Public Service Reform: The Case of Kenya', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 31, 3 (1993), p. 467.

[91] Kanyinga, 'Concentrated Multipolarity', p. 40.

[92] Barkan, 'Decentralization and Democratization', p. 5.

With a civil service whose integrity was highly questionable, the implementation of the policy of decentralisation was bound to be a fiasco. In many instances, DCs appointed by the president decided on the development projects to initiate in their districts and how resource would be allocated, mainly on the basis of political patronage and centrally-controlled networks. This amounted to control of state resources by a Kalenjin clique and a redistribution of resources away from Central Province to the so-called less developed areas, including Moi's home region: Rift Valley Province. By the mid-1980s, disproportionate allocation of state resources through DFRD was manifest. In 1986, for instance, the Rift Valley Province with only 21 percent of Kenya's population received 52 percent of the budgetary allocation for roads, although this dropped to 44 percent the following year.[93] This trend continued and by the end of 2002, the road network in Moi's Rift Valley stronghold was more extensive than that found in any other part of country at that time. This compares favourably with infrastructural development in Kiambu District by the late 1970s.

Following the shift in power base from Central Province to Rift Valley Province, a dilapidated road network in most parts of Thika District manifested the area's neglect during the Moi era. The poor state of the road network in the district was reportedly constrained by unavailability of funds to purchase the necessary equipment and materials.[94] The best that could be for the roads was either patching or gravelling, which were also constrained by the financial ceiling imposed by the DDC. This was despite the fact that coffee farmers in the district continued to pay cess, a fee levied by county councils for the maintenance of roads.

An additional drawback in the implementation of DFRD was that in each DDC's plan or budget, items were arbitrarily added to or removed from the eligibility list either by politicians or the government officers. One District Officer (DO) remarked: 'to say that ordinary people participate in making decisions is a joke; they have to be guided by the elite or at least be energised to participate'.[95] Moreover, heads of DDCs could

[93] Barkan, 'Decentralising the State', pp. 449, 450.

[94] KNA/MA/12/199: Kiambu District Annual Report General 1973-1994.

[95] Quoted in Richard Crook, 'Decentralization and Poverty Reduction in Africa: The Politics of Local-Central Relations' (Sussex; Brighton, 2001), p. 7.

‘delete proposals without recourse to democratic procedures’.[96] The DFRD therefore paid lip service to grassroots representation as the following cases from Thika District illustrate.

The Ngoliba, Ruiru, Juja and Gachororo water projects, which stalled in 2001 owing to ‘lack of adequate funding or expertise’, had been on the agenda of the local DDC since the 1980s.[97] Similarly, of the 21 projects identified by the Thika DDC for funding in 1991, only 10 were considered owing to insufficient funds to implement all of them.[98] In the 1980s, some of the projects that had stalled included Thika, Gatundu, Igegania and Munyu health facilities that needed expansion as well as supply of essential equipment.[99] At the Ruiru Health Centre, construction of a maternity ward stalled for close to ten years owing to bureaucratic red tape in the disbursement of funds, an important impediment to the implementation of many projects in the district.[100] Central Kenya in general and Thika District in particular bore the brunt of neglect owing to low political representation in what Kanyinga calls the Second Republic or Moi’s regime.[101] The deteriorating health care services in Thika District, for example, could not cope with the demand for such services as the decline coincided with the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

While this was happening in Thika District, available evidence suggests that health care in the Rift Valley Province was at an optimal level.[102] Indeed, in 2000 a comparative study on child mortality in sub-Saharan Africa revealed that in Kenya,

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[96] *Ibid.*

[97] Minutes of Thika DDC, Various Years.

[98] KNA/AMC/4/5: District Development Committee 1991.

[99] RoK, *Kiambu District Development Plan 1979-83* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1979), p.19.

[100] KNA/AMC/4/3: Thika District Development Committee 1984.

[101] Kanyinga, ‘Ethnicity, Patronage and Class’, p. 95.

[102] Barkan, ‘Decentralising the State’, p. 449.

political influence had a direct bearing on access to health care services.[103] In particular, Kalenjin children were 50 percent less likely to die before age five than children in other Kenyan communities - including those of the Kikuyu despite the former community's predominant rural residence.[104]

In light of the foregoing it may argued that though a shift of resources to the ethno-regional base of the Moi regime could have been accomplished without the DFRD, the strategy provided a cover for legitimising disproportionate allocation of national resources. Indeed, decentralisation was not about redistribution or correction of historical imbalances but about the creation of cleavages for the ruling regime. Ethnic politics grossly undermined equal access to public resources. Accordingly, access to resources during the Moi era depended on whether one was recognised as a member of the 'KANU tribe' by the government.[105] The influence of the DFRD strategy on the underdevelopment Thika District and related issues is covered some of the chapters in this thesis.

Closely allied to the politics of decentralisation was the self-help or *harambee* movement, which was facilitated by the DDCs.[106] The Moi regime mandated DDCs to regulate self-help activities and thus used the institutions to stifle local initiatives in districts whose residents were considered disloyal to the regime, particularly those where opposition political parties enjoyed some support. Since Moi had little support in Thika District, and indeed the whole of Central Province, he used opponents of the Kenyatta family not only to undermine the family but also to stifle socio-economic development in the district.

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103 Martin Brockerhoff and P. Hewitt, 'Inequality of Child Mortality Among Ethnic Groups in Sub-Saharan Africa', *Bulletin of the World Health Organisation*, 78, 1 (2000), pp. 33-4.

104 *Ibid.*

105 Rok Ajulu, 'Kenya: The Succession and the Prospects of Political Stability in the Post-Moi Era', *Global Institute Dialogue*, 22, 1 (2002), p. 3.

106 Gerrishon Ikiara and Arne Tostensen, 'The Political Economy of Poverty Reduction in Kenya' (A Report for the Chr. Michelsen Institute: Stockholm: SIDA, 1996), p. 30.

To begin with, Moi used the ruling party machinery to marginalise close associates of Kenyatta such as Mbiyu Koinange, James Gichuru, Gitu Kahengeri and Waira Kamau, among other long-serving politicians and administrators.[107] The latter two were politicians in Thika District. Moi systematically intervened in local processes in order to dislocate existing forces and alliances while endeavouring to reconstitute new ones.[108] In an attempt to create allies, Moi recruited the likes of Njenga Karume (formerly a close associate of Kenyatta), Arthur Magugu, Josphat Karanja and Kuria Kanyingi, all whom hailed from Kiambu District but outside present-day Thika District. Employing clientele politics, these politicians variously delivered development projects to their respective constituents.

The projects that were implemented in Kiambu appeared to be those proposed by committees which were allied to the local MPs and the provincial administration. Therefore areas that were represented in parliament by the personalities mentioned above had an undue advantage over the rest of the divisions in the district. In the 1980s, *harambees* were mainly organised for divisions where Kanu enjoyed support. Politicians, who showed allegiance to the president and the party, received donations from him and his allies. Notably, certain politicians in Kiambu benefitted from this informal arrangement and the reverse was also true. A comparative analysis of *harambee* projects in Limuru and Githunguri with that of Thika/Gatundu follows. Arthur Magugu, who was the MP for Githunguri, a cabinet minister and a close ally of Moi in the 1980s, was the chief-fundraiser in his division. He was the Kanu-torch bearer until the mid-1980s. Although Magugu was dropped by Moi for having failed to break down the power of Karume and the Kenyatta family in Kiambu, he is credited with having brought development to Githunguri division, especially in respect to women's groups.

Similarly, Josphat Karanja, who also served for a short stint as vice-president, was pivotal in bringing development to Kiambu district but not Thika. He attempted to break the power of Ngengi and Muhoho, MPs for Gatundu and Juja/Thika divisions

[107] Tamarkin, 'Charles Njonjo and Kenyan Politics', p. 66.

[108] Kanyinga, 'Ethnicity, Patronage and Class', p. 89.

respectively.[109] The work of Magugu was continued by Kuria Kanyingi, of the Limuru women's groups bus projects fame. His projects in education, health and self-help dwarfed all previous ones in Kiambu district.[110] The chief beneficiaries of Magugu, Karanja and Kuria's largesse were women's groups in the Limuru and Githunguri divisions. The women's groups bus projects benefitted from substantial commercial bank loans and fund-raisers which were organised under the guise of familiarising up-coming politicians with their electorates.[111] This was a conduit that reflects the extent to which the new governing elite and their allies in Kiambu enjoyed privileged access to state financial resources.[112] The fund-raisers created cleavages and marginalised those areas that did not support the president and the ruling party.

On the contrary Thika did not produce close allies of the Moi presidency. Subsequently, few *harambee* projects were organised for the people in the district. In addition, the intra-Kikuyu tension that prevailed between Kiambu politicians hampered uniform development in the district. George Muhoho, the MP for Thika/Juja successfully prevented a bus project being started in his Juja constituency.[113] Moreover, development projects which were initiated by Muhoho and his allies were denied state resources.[114] It was only in 1991 that the Juja Division Women Bus Project was launched.[115] While women's groups in Lari, Limuru and Githunguri divisions prospered from the dividends accrued from the bus project, their counterparts in Juja/Thika struggled to make ends meet in small scale farming enterprises.[116] It is therefore important not to make generalisations about development

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[109] *Ibid.*, p. 106.

[110] *Ibid.*, p.107.

[111] *Ibid.*, p.105.

[112] Haugerud, *The Culture of Politics*, p.40.

[113] Kanyinga, 'Ethnicity, Patronage and Class', pp.107, 108.

[114] *Ibid.*

[115] *Thika Times,* March 1991.

[116] KNA/MA/12/15: Kiambu District Annual Report 1981-1983.

of the entire former Kiambu district. A closer scrutiny at the events on the ground reveals a far more complex situation.

President Moi's slogan "*siasa mbaya maisha mbaya"* (loosely meant 'bad', which when equated to opposition politics was translated as bad life) was employed and practiced after 1992 with the re-introduction of multipartyism. It is on record that some Kanu politicians voiced the opinion that 'only persons and areas loyal to the regime and the ruling party would expect to benefit from state resources'.[117] Subsequently, in 1994 Moi and a number of senior ministers from Kanu stated in various political fora that those areas which had voted for opposition parties in the 1992 multiparty elections would not have access to development resources.[118] Therefore, *harambee* was turned into an election driven activity and it lost its initial meaning as enshrined in *Sessional Paper No. 10.* A comparative analysis of *harambee* contributions in Kiambu district and those at the national level before and after the reintroduction of multipartyism is illustrative.

In the 1980s, *harambee* contributions accounted for seven percent of the total amount of money collected in *harambee* fundraisers.[119] But in the first half and second half of the 1990s *harambee* rose to 26 and 60 percent respectively.[120] The remarkable rise in money collected in the second half of the decade suggests that *harambee* was turned into a campaign forum which was selectively used in areas that were sympathetic to Kanu. It was Moi who launched and closed *harambee* 'seasons' in the country. This directive was however applied selectively. In Thika, for instance, several self-help projects were purportedly put on hold, awaiting a presidential directive. In 1991 the Thika DDC was compelled to put on a fixed deposit monies

[117] Frank Holmquist and Michael Ford, 'Kenya: State and Civil Society the First Year After Election', *Africa Today*, 41, 4 (1994), p.14.

[118] Ikiara, 'The Political Economy of Poverty Reduction in Kenya', p.59.

[119] Anne Waiguru, 'Corruption and Patronage Politics: The Case of *Harambee* in Kenya' (A Paper Presented at a Workshop on Measuring Corruption, Centre for Ethics, Law, Justice and Governance, Transparency International, Brisbane, Australia, October, 2002), p.7.

[120] *Ibid.,* p.9.

collected through *harambee* for *nyayo* wards following suspension of *harambee* by the president.[121] Similar cases abound attesting to how Thika was marginalised in the development stakes because its residents pursued anti-Kanu politics.

Although some projects in Kiambu district benefitted from *harambee* projects in which the Kenyattas were involved, it is important to note that Kenyatta rarely became directly involved in fund-raising for particular projects.[122] The reverse was true for his successor who from the late 1980s and 1990s was the chief fund-raiser and guest of honour in all major *harambees.* By 1993 Kiambu district was one of Kenya's most marginal districts. This could be attributed to the fact that the district, Kenyatta's former political base, was in mainstream opposition politics.[123] In a nutshell, decentralisation was used to further Moi's political agenda. This strategy was pursued under the guise of facilitating equitable distribution of resources and correcting historical distortions (those of colonial and Kenyatta's creation), two notions which received wide support from the small ethnic communities. Ultimately, the District Focus turned out to be a conduit which was employed to marginalise and impoverish certain regions in Kenya.

The removal of the Kikuyu from political power was followed by their loss of control of key agricultural institutions and this adversely affected agriculture, the life-line of central Kenya. Also, the implementation of neo-liberal policies in the 1980s had adverse effects on Kenya's local industries. By the early 1980s, Kenya's dependent industrialisation had also exhausted most first-stage options for establishing import substitution industries. In the 1980s evidence of a declining industrial town were apparent in the town of Thika. Since the late colonial period the textile industry enjoyed protectionism from the government. Effective rates of protection allowed the local firms to compete in the domestic market, despite their inefficient cost structure as compared to firms operating in international markets. But in the era of

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[121] KNA/AMC/4/5: District Development Committee 1991.

[122] Michael Bratton, and Nicolas Van de Walle, *Democratic Experiments in Africa; Transition Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.186.

[123] Barkan, 'Decentralization and Democratization in Sub-Saharan Africa', p. 3.

liberalisation, the embryonic industries could not compete and most firms were closed down.

For instance, in 1995 the KTM was liquidated and placed under receivership for a debt of Sh. 7 million. This led to the shedding of over 1,000 jobs.[124] Similar losses were taking place in other firms in the town. Thus from around the mid-1980s, reports from Department of Labour in Thika district cited massive job losses, soaring unemployment and rising poverty.[125] Chapters five and six examine the influence of the collapse of some the key sources of employment and its attendant miseries.

At this point it is important that we assess how Kikuyu businesses performed during the Moi era. In spite of the ethno-regional politics that no longer favoured Kenyatta's elites during the Moi era, a few Kikuyu business people largely outside the industrial sector continued to benefit.[126] These include, Njenga Karume for some time and members of the Kenyatta family, although later they were marginalised and the Moi regime demonstrated support for those opposed to them.[127] For instance, Mwai Kibaki was used by Moi to undermine the position of the Kenyatta family and the Kiambu Kikuyu establishment.[128] Kibaki's support for Moi against the Kiambu Kikuyu establishment reflected the resentment of the northern Kikuyu at the meagre benefits they had enjoyed under Kenyatta.

Further inroads against Kikuyu capital came from Asian capital which Moi seemed to favour. In the fight against the Kikuyu, the former president replaced African capital, which was mainly Kikuyu, with that of Asians. Initially he had bitterly and publicly

[124] *Thika Times*, June 1995, p.17.

[125]KNA/AMC/14/20: Thika Division Monthly Reports Other Departments 1982; KNA/AMC/14/15: Thika Division Annual Report 1993 and RoK, *Thika District Development Plan 2002-2008* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 2002).

[126] Frank Holmquist, 'Business and Politics in Kenya in the 1990s' (Occasional Paper, Centre for African Studies, University of Copenhagen, July 2002), p.10.

[127] Barkan, 'Decentralization and Democratization', p.19.

[128] Tamarkin, 'Charles Njonjo and Kenyan Politics', p.66.

attacked Asians as the source of corruption in Kenya. In time he secured Asian financial leverage as a political weapon against the economic power of the Kikuyu.[129] In a rather explicit manner Moi tolerated Asians even as they were involved in illegal foreign exchange and black market under the protection of Kenyan central Bank officials.[130]

By the end of Moi's rule in 2002, it can be said that to some extent Kikuyu capitalists escaped attacks from the regime and came back strongly. Among these were those in a wide range of other economic groups such as the delivery of agricultural services and those in the development of infrastructure in Moi's own Rift Valley Province.[131] However, the same cannot be said of the poor, owing to changes in the local and international political economy. Moi's ascendancy to presidency coincided with changes in international markets. The end of the world coffee boom in 1979 and Kenya's economy began to falter under the impact of oil-induced recession. Shortage of money, foreign and local, consequent shortages of raw materials for industry and large increases in consumer prices became characteristic of Kenya's economy under Moi's presidency.[132] The rise in poverty levels in the last two decades or so coincided with the Moi era and therefore this ought to be contextualised in the global political economy, given that some of these pressures were beyond his control.

Another factor which contributed to the rise in poverty in Kenya in general and Thika in particular was that, President Moi's new governing elite comprised a relatively weak economic class, in stark contrast to the well developed-capitalist class that made up the Kenyatta clique. The Kalenjin clique was constructed from scratch and this entailed the destruction of the Kiambu Kikuyu establishment, sometime to the extent of dissolution. This simultaneous process is also seen as the 'dekikuyuisation' and 'Kalenjinisation' of Kenya. During the Moi era resources were no longer allocated in

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[129] *Africa Confidential*, 24 June 1987, p.7.

[130] *Ibid.*

[131] Barkan, *Beyond Socialism*, p.159.

[132] Tamarkin, 'Charles Njonjo and Kenyan Politics', pp. 66, 67.

terms of comparative advantage but rather with a view to establishing self-sufficiency in the provision of food. This will be elaborated upon in chapters three and four.

This chapter has situated Thika in Kenya's political economy. The settlement of the Kikuyu in modern-day Thika district has been examined. It has been argued that the colonial intrusion of the late nineteenth century disrupted the entrenchment of the Kikuyu in the area. Colonial agricultural policies suppressed commodity production among the Africans. But by the early 1920s a class of proto-capitalists had emerged among the Kikuyu in Kiambu. They formed the bulk of post-colonial elite. The post-colonial state perpetuated the capitalistic policies set up by its predecessor. This continuity was guaranteed by the emergence of a black elite which succeeded its predecessor. In the post-colonial period, ethnic politics replaced the politics of race.

During the Kenyatta presidency, the state favoured the areas occupied by the Kikuyu and their allies. The process of 'Kenyanisation' favoured the Kikuyu who emerged as controllers of the local commercial and industrial sectors, albeit the Kenyatta family and their close associates scooped the greatest share of spoils. Class interests also transcended those of ethnicity in the sunset years of Kenyatta's rule. This was manifested in the intra-Kikuyu rivalry of the mid-1970s prompted by succession politics. The Kenyatta regime was kleptocratic and ethnically exclusive politics resulted in antagonism between the Kikuyu and non-Kikuyu groups. Following the demise of Kenyatta, the Kikuyu elite were gradually weeded out of the civil service and their economic power shattered.

During the Moi regime, the state became more autocratic. President Moi used the District Focus as a conduit with which to marginalise and impoverish Kikuyuland. In both the Kenyatta and Moi eras, the governing elites used the resources of the state for their own benefit. Moi used the same clientele politics but his tenure coincided with a global economic recession. It is in light of this that poverty is seen to have been exacerbated during the last two decades or so. The two post-colonial regimes tended to be ethnic-centered and geared towards the politics of patrimonalism. Both class and ethnic interests hampered the realisation of the ideals that were enunciated by Kenyan leaders at independence. In the past there has been a tendency to describe the effects of discrimination and tribalism in a monolithic way which suggests that its manifestations and effects are uniform. This chapter has demonstrated how different classes have excluded or incorporated ethnic groups, arguing that while there was exclusion of non-Kikuyu in Kenyatta's era, there were some exceptions, and the same could be said of the Moi era. In no way does the argument in this chapter imply that all the people in the Rift Valley benefitted from the Moi regime. Indeed some were marginalized as ever and so they have remained. Our main argument is that generally the marginalized classes who include the peasants and the poor hardly benefit from regimes such as that of Kenyatta and Moi. Rather, they bear the brunt of ethnic politics as the institutions in place do not guarantee that state resources 'trickle down' to them even in cases where they enjoyed ethnic ties to the governing elite. This point is further illuminated in the next chapter which examines the process of land consolidation and distribution.

CHAPTER TWO

THE ROOTS OF POVERTY: LAND REFORMS AND REDISTRIBUTION IN THIKA DISTRICT, 1953-2000

Most Kenyans look to land for social security. To many, owning a piece of land in the rural areas, no matter how small, is very important. Since the colonial period, land matters have been central to Kenya's political economy. Despite numerous attempts to solve land problems through such mechanisms as land reform and land commissions, Kenyans are yet to resolve the problem of inequitable distribution of land.

Failure to place limits on individual land ownership, leading to speculative land buying, has rendered many of Kenyans landless.[1] These problems have their roots in land alienation and related practices during the colonial period as well as concentration of power over land control in the hands of the president and the commissioner of lands in independent Kenya. All these practices have led to concentration of a large quantity of land either in the hands of individuals or corporations. Such skewed distribution of land has been a major source of frustration to many in the country. Land clashes, squatting and evictions have become a permanent feature of life in many parts of Kenya.[2] The so-called tribal clashes in parts of the country in the 1990s and the invasions of European-owned ranches by the Maasai community in 2004 are manifestations of contestation over control and ownership of land.

In a predominantly agricultural economy, Kenyans are concerned about land reforms. But neither the nature of the reforms nor the procedures to be followed have been decided upon despite consensus that land reforms in the country are necessary. Land

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[1] Republic of Kenya (RoK), *Report on the Commission of Inquiry into Land Law System* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 2002), p.103.

[2] See Steeves Jeffrey, 'Ethnic Clashes in Kenya and the Politics of the "Ethnic Enclave": The Ruling Party, the Opposition, and the Post-Moi Succession' in Pal Ahluwalia and Abebe Zegeye (eds.), *African Identities Contemporary Political and Social Challenges* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002).

redistribution could help solve the twin problems of landlessness and food insecurity, which are chief causes of poverty.

It is noteworthy that only 17 percent of Kenya's land is arable.[3] According to the Kenya Land Alliance, a lobby group for land reform, more than half of the arable land in the country is in the hands of only 20 percent of the 33 million Kenyans. That leaves 13 per cent of the population landless or near landless while another 67 percent, on average, own less than one acre per person. No wonder smallholders constitute a majority of the poor in Kenya.[4]

This chapter is divided into three sections. Section one examines the Swynnerton Plan and the land consolidation process in Thika District while the second part examines the resettlement programme, paying particular attention to the *haraka* schemes. The final section explores the immediate and long-term effects of the land reforms. It is noteworthy that for much of the period covered in this chapter, Thika was part of Kiambu District, making it necessary at times to refer to one or the other district. Land issues in Thika during the period under consideration were dominated by politics and land was used for political patronage.

Land Ownership in the Colonial Period, 1895-1954

Colonialism was driven by political and economic imperatives. To facilitate colonial political economy, new land policies were introduced in Kenya. The English Land Law was imported into the protectorate and applied to areas that were designated as White Highlands for the exclusive settlement of whites. These areas were selected from the more arable and habitable parts of the colony. Under English Law, the white settlers secured freeholds and long-lease titles but not rights of occupancy. An alien perspective of land ownership began to emerge and the state became an important player in land use and control. The land users held land at the pleasure of the state.

[3] Arthur Hazlewood, *The Economy of Kenya: The Kenyatta Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p.29.

[4] RoK, *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper 2001-2004* (Nairobi: Government Printer), p.5.

This perspective led to a declaration in 1915 that Africans were tenants-at will of the state. Colonial administrators and courts were generally of the view that English Law was inappropriate for the African sector of the economy. Hence, many of these imported laws were made specifically applicable to land which until the 1960s was held and farmed almost exclusively by European settlers. Native law and custom were applied to the Native Land Units or reserves. The fundamental point of divergence between the alien land laws and African land tenure systems is fairly obvious; the latter system distinguished political authority from land tenure.

As already indicated, Thika is one of the areas that attracted white settlers in Kenya. The undulating land and fertile soils were ideal for the establishment of coffee and sisal estates.[5] By the early 1910s, the land between the Chania and Ruiru rivers had been alienated for the coffee, pineapple and sisal plantations that Thika became famous for.[6] With little or no compensation, the Kikuyu in the area were transformed into tenants or squatters, using land that was not immediately put under plantation agriculture and providing labour to white settlers. The appropriation of land by white settlers denied the Thika Kikuyu their main source of livelihood. They were deprived of pastures, salt licks and the cultivation rights that had existed under the customary land tenure system. Whenever the Kikuyu attempted to access any of these, they were charged with trespass. Deprived of livelihood, some of the Kikuyu migrated to the Rift Valley. However, a few clans did not lose their land rights. But as their populations grew, and structural changes in both agriculture and non-farm sectors occurred, both children and adults became involved in wage-employment (see chapters five and six). Poverty, disease, famine and racial tensions came to characterize Kikuyu life from as early as the 1910s.

By the late 1940s, much of the expropriated land was largely underutilized to the annoyance of Kikuyu squatters, who were infuriated by the settler-induced evictions in the late 1930s. Squatters at the time were regarded by the settlers as a surplus

[5] Trzebinski Errol, *The Kenya Pioneers* (London: Heinemann, 1985), pp. 145, 146.

[6] KNA/PC/CP/9/8/15: Central Province Annual Report, 1930.

population that undermined development of capitalist farming.[7] Mechanization of agriculture rendered squatter labour obsolete. The evictions led to a return of a reserve army of a landless, discontented populace to the reserves and this marked the beginnings of a looming conflict.[8] In the Makuyu and Ol Donyo Sabuk divisions of Thika District, the resident labour was expelled in the 1950s. In the latter areas, Akamba squatters who had defied government orders to reduce their livestock holdings, were blamed by the colonial administration for having 'created a desert in the borders of the White Highlands'.[9] The tendency of the Akamba to overstock their land with cattle and goats led to land degradation which the colonial administration refused to tolerate. Legislation was passed that allowed the Akamba time to move their livestock to the Machakos and Thika reserves. By use of force, including razing of their huts and sale of livestock, the provincial administration with the help of settlers overpowered the Akamba squatters who were pushed out of the Eastern White Highlands completely.[10] Subsequently, the ex-squatters were bereft of monthly wages as well as livestock. Deprived of land and livestock, they had no security for their future livelihoods. A fortunate few were allocated land in the settlement schemes that were set up by the independent government.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the idea of private ownership combined with outright sale and purchase of land (irredeemable sale), was well underway in the 1930s among the Kikuyu of Kiambu District. This was in contrast to the pre-colonial land tenure system whereby sold land could be redeemed to the *mbari* (clan) in case the buyer wanted to dispose of it. The basis for redemption was represented by the phrase *githaka ni ngwatira* meaning that 'land is a loan'.[11] The new system of land

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[7] Tabitha Kanogo, *Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau 1905-63* (London: James Currey, 1987), p.136.

[8] Elisha Atieno-Odhiambo, 'The Formative Years', in B. A. Ogot and W. R. Ochieng' (eds.), *Decolonization and Independence in Kenya, 1940-93* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1993), p. 27.

[9] KNA/VQ/16/4: Thika District Monthly Reports 1949-58.

[10] *Ibid.*

[11] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1938), p.20.

tenure was exploited by chiefs, tribunal elders and the educated minority to deprive poor *mbari* members of their land rights.[12]

Consequently, by the 1940s poverty was evident in many parts of Kiambu. The land poor or landless Kikuyu sought wage labour in Nairobi to eke out a livelihood. But urban wages were artificially kept low and could only cover taxes, with small savings for bride's wealth.[13] Repair of buildings, replacement of agricultural tools and medical expenses were unaffordable for most wage-earners, who headed about 40 percent of the households in Kiambu.[14]

The influx of squatters evicted from the Rift Valley into Kikuyu reserves compounded the problems being experienced in these reserves. In the face of increasing poverty and deprivation, the Kikuyu agitated for a return of alienated ('stolen') land. When protests failed to bear fruit, the Kikuyu took to the forest to fight in what came to be referred to as the anti-state Mau Mau struggle. In the eyes of Sir Lyold, the District Commissioner (DC) of Kiambu, squatters 'were mostly bitter landless and penniless persons who joined the passive wing of the Mau Mau, but owing to their poverty, it was difficult to take retaliatory actions and many had to be employed in paid gangs'.[15] The impoverished masses readily joined the Mau Mau movement in the 1950s. The issue of land took centre stage in the independence negotiations taking place between the Kenyan elite and the British government from the 1950s. The negotiations culminated in the Swynnerton Plan in 1954.

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[12] Gavin Kitching, *Class and Economic Change in Kenya: The Making of an African Petite Bourgeoisie 1905-1970* (New Haven Conn: Yale University Press, 1980), p.292.

[13] Greet Kershaw, *Mau Mau from Below* (London: James Currey, 1997), p.165.

[14] *Ibid.*

[15] Anthony Clayton and Donald Savage, *Government and Labour in Kenya 1895-1963* (London: Frank Cass, 1974), p.353; Gary Wasserman, 'The Independence Bargain: Kenya Europeans and the Land Issue, 1960-62', *Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies,* vol. xi, (1973).

Land Reforms: The Swynnerton Plan of 1954

In the late 1940s, many of the people in Kiambu took advantage of the breakdown in Kikuyu customs to acquire land belonging to other *mbari* (clans) by dealing with individuals and without consulting other relatives who had an interest in the land. At the other end of the scale, there was a growing landless class, consisting of those Kikuyu who had sold land or *ahoi* who were squeezed out as a result of the increasing need for landowners to cultivate all of their land. This situation led to widespread land litigations, forcing the colonial administration to launch the Swynnerton Plan as a mechanism for dealing with increasing land problems.

The programme is named after its head, R. J. M. Swynnerton, Kenya's assistant director of agriculture who launched it in 1954. The Plan was to provide land-owners with security of tenure or a title deed, which could be used as collateral to obtain financial credit for agricultural development.[16] Registration of land in what is now Thika District began in the late 1950s, making it one of the first districts in the country to complete the land consolidation process. As Ruiru and Gatundu divisions were then in Kiambu District, they receive mention in this chapter. Since a lot of land in these divisions was under plantation agriculture, it remained as such after independence. Many of the plantations in Thika District were taken over intact by an African elite at independence. In the next section we focus on the actual process of land consolidation.

Land Consolidation

In Kiambu District, the land consolidation and registration process began in 1955 under J. M. Golds, formerly a District Officer (DO). After touring neighbouring Fort Hall District, where the process was underway, and getting impressed by the progress made there, he launched the programme in Kiambu with haste and efficiency. He established a land consolidation committee comprising the District Commissioner (DC), the District Agricultural Officer (DAO), other government officers, local chiefs

[16] R. J. M. Swynnerton, *A Plan to Intensify African Agriculture in Kenya* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1954), p. 9.

and elders. Many of the men involved in the programme had served in the Kikuyu reserves, organising and leading operations against Mau Mau 'guerrillas'.[17]

Rich and educated Kikuyu men were recruited as surveyors and clerks, giving them some leverage in the programme.[18] For instance, these collaborators tended to favour people who had supported the government while discriminating against Mau Mau fighters and their sympathizers when allocating land.[19] As Sorrenson observed, 'It would be surprising if they [government officials] did not use some of the Emergency methods of pushing people about in their land consolidation work'.[20] Before land consolidation commenced in a given location, letters were sent to employers to release employees from the said location so that they could participate in the exercise. However, the extent of the success of such an arrangement remains highly questionable.

The consolidation process commenced with the identification of the fragments of land belonging to individuals or families. The elders on the committee who knew the local people were called upon to ascertain or give assent to any claims and solve arising disputes. This was followed by aerial photography of the holdings which were then marked in maps and later on the ground. In Kiambu a four-acres holding was considered as adequate to warrant titling.[21] Finally, the actual farm boundaries were fixed before owners were allowed to put up a hedge or *itoka.*

As it turned out, there were land disputes that had to be settled before the consolidation process could proceed in the district. To raise money for litigation, many *mbari* not only rallied their members, but also accepted contributions even from

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[17] M. P. K. Sorrenson, *Land Reform in the Kikuyu Country* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p.242.

[18] RoK, *Report on the Commission of Inquiry into Land Law System,* p.102.

[19] Sorrenson, *Land Reform*, p. 242.

[20] *Ibid*.

[21] *Ibid.,* p. 161.

non-kin. In the event that litigation was successful, contributors would be rewarded with a piece of the land. Therefore the law legalising private land ownership strengthened the kinship ties, especially of the strong *mbari.*[22] The stronger the *mbari,* the more land it was likely to acquire as wealthy men were able to "resurrect" the *mbari* in their own interests. Sometimes this entailed calling for evidence from elders who were far from being the upholders of some imaginary "egalitarian communalism".[23] Members of a family whose holdings were inadequate to qualify for a title were forced to merge their plots. This sowed the seeds for future land problems. In many instances, clan elders who were in the land committees were not neutral observers. To many of the landless people interviewed in this study, it was apparent that elders were biased and prejudiced. Moreover, the poor were barely represented in the African courts where land disputes were heard and so their rights were sacrificed to the altar of the well-to-do *mbari*. Land-owners and the *ahoi* traded accusations and counter-accusations of fraud and bribery. Families and neighbours turned against each other over actual ownership of pieces of land or their boundaries. At one point, the whole process stalled owing to an escalation in disputes.[24] A few examples of cases of injustice and extortions in the adjudication process in Kiambu are provided in order to illustrate the problems afflicting the residents of Thika District from as early as the mid-1950s.

In 1972, two brothers, namely Kamau and Mwaura Gichuguma, were involved in a land dispute that started as far back as 1955. Mwaura, who was the plaintiff, accused his brother of using bribery to deprive him of an equal share of their ancestral land. According to Mwaura, Chief Gathecha received Sh.500 while Samwel Mwihia, the Land Demarcation Officer, received Sh.60. In addition, Kamau also slaughtered a ram and brewed beer for the two. In return, the pair employed a certain Captain Thuo who

[22] Sara Berry, 'Coping With Confusion: African Farmer's Responses to Economic Instability in the 1970s and 1980s' in Thomas Callaghy and John Ravenhill (eds.) *Hemmed in Responses to Africa's Economic Decline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p.268.

[23] David Throup, *Economic and Social Origins of Mau Mau* (Oxford: James Currey, 1987), p.72.

[24] KNA/MA/7/10: Land Consolidation 1958.

came with a gun to guard the demarcation of the land in question. During the process of surveying, Mwaura was taken into police custody to prevent him from interfering with the adjudication process. On Mwihia's instructions, Mwaura was allocated a four-acre farm of which he disapproved and therefore uprooted the hedge that had been put up by the surveyor. This act landed Mwaura in remand for close to three weeks. However, 'on the day my [Mwaura] case was supposed to be heard, no one appeared and the court set me free'.[25] Twenty years later Mwaura was still seeking justice.

In 1972, Mwaura wrote to the DC explaining the circumstances through which he had lost his land. He pleaded 'I therefore ask you [DC] to look [sic] this matter and pay attention please'.[26] After an exchange of correspondence between the DC and Mwaura, the former finally dismissed the case thus:

> ….As afar as I know land consolidation in your area was completed some years ago [1950s]. Notice to that effect was displayed in public places showing the respective completed areas and people with similar complaints to yours were thereby requested to lodge their appeal accordingly. The time given to inspect the *bona fide* register was 60 days which have since lapsed. It is therefore regretted that there is nothing I can do for you in this matter.[27]

Mwaura's case is replicated in most of the annual reports of this period. In some instances, family members took advantage of the absence of their relatives who were in detention or away in employment and successfully claimed their land.[28] Use of force and intimidation were commonly cited as ways in which land was wrongly acquired and retained.[29]

Accordingly, land litigation has remained a sensitive issue in Kiambu ever since the 1950s. But many complaints are often dismissed as having been lodged after the

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[25] KNA/MA/7/9: Land Consolidation Complaints 1972.

[26] *Ibid.*

[27] *Ibid.*

[28] KNA/VQ/4/3: Land Complaints.

[29] Personal Communication, Njuguna Wanyoike, Ruiru, 26 July 2002.

appeal period laid down by the Land Tenure Rules has lapsed. Yet, some of the people who were in migrant labour were unable to get to their reserves before the commencement of the land adjudication in their areas. Furthermore, Land Tenure Rules did not necessarily guarantee a fair hearing of appeals.[30] There is evidence that the execution of the land consolidation process was plagued by vendetta and intrigue.

Another open form of injustice in land consolidation was the enactment of the Forfeiture of Lands Ordinance in 1953. The Ordinance provided for the confiscation of land belonging to 'all those who had participated or aided in violent resistance against the forces of law'.[31] For instance, one Isaya, son of Njoroge, lamented that his land had been confiscated due to his father's involvement in Mau Mau activities. When he appealed for justice, the provincial administration reminded him that 'his father was very active when the Mau Mau were fighting the government' and therefore the land could not revert to his use.[32] Similarly, a chief in the Ndarugu area of Ruiru division forwarded to the Land Court a list of 22 people dubbed as 'terrorists', recommending confiscation of their land. These were some of the victims of the unpopular ordinance which in a way institutionalised the deprivation of the vulnerable masses in Thika District of land.

Collated evidence from oral and archival sources, though scanty, suggests that the ordinance had adverse effects on the land consolidation and registration process in the whole of Thika District.[33] Though the holdings that were confiscated may not have been substantial, in a division such as Gatundu, where land congestion was common, any amount of injustice or unfair loss was bound to have ripple effects. Assuming that all the divisions in the district suffered such losses through confiscation and other forms of injustice, the results would have been incremental growth in dissatisfaction. In addition, residents of Thika District were already experiencing the effects of soil degradation such as food shortages and malnutrition. The seizure of holdings,

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[30] Sorrenson, *Land Reform*, p. 211.

[31] KNA/MA/7/9: Land Consolidation Complaints 1972.

[32] *Ibid.*

therefore, jeopardised livelihoods of group already affected by land alienation. Moreover, wage labour and squatting undermined the ability of the landless to transcend poverty and deprivation in future.
Notwithstanding the above and similar cases, Sorrenson underestimates the effects of the Forfeiture Ordinance. He asserts that only an insubstantial amount of land was confiscated before the ordinance was amended in mid-1955. With the amendment of the Forfeiture of Lands Ordinance and confiscation of land belonging to 'guerrillas' at large, the government was content that it had inflicted sufficient punishment on the Mau Mau insurgents.

In the final analysis, the consolidation of individual freehold titles replaced traditional land tenure. Land consolidation and registration enabled Africans landowners to obtain credit for agricultural development, which explains the extent of the claims and disputes that plagued the process. Generally, the well-to-do gained from the process owing to their ability to meet the cost of pursuing their claims through the legal process, including the cost of providing witnesses to support them.[34] The eventual concentration of land ownership in the hands of those who had money to spare and the creation of a landless class was an inevitable outcome of the process.

From the 1950s, land in Kenya became not just a major source of livelihood but also the basis for individual vertical mobility, an important appropriate factor in individual aggrandizement. Evidently, land consolidation was followed by rapid social differentiation amongst the peasantry, leading to the emergence of rural capitalists and the conversion of the bulk of the peasantry into landless farm hands.[35] By 1980, most cultivated land in Kiambu was held under freehold title.

Since the programme of land consolidation was largely a political measure to counter the Mau Mau, priority in land consolidation was accorded to the three Kikuyu districts

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[34] Diana Hunt, *The Impending Crisis in Kenya: The Case for Land Reform* (Aldershot: Gower 1984), p. 12.

[35] Robert Bates, *Beyond the Miracle of the Miracle: The Political Economy of Agrarian Development in Kenya* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 28.

which were deeply involved in the struggle for land.[36] The advice by the Kiambu DC to his officers to hasten the exercise and 'hit the iron when it is hot' lends credence to this point of view.[37] Land consolidation was to be accomplished while those involved in the Mau Mau struggle were still in detention or in the forests lest they disrupt the process.

At the end of the process, detailed surveys on the ground in Kiambu revealed demarcation inaccuracies. The disgruntled land-owners lodged complaints with the African courts, but they were met with resistance from the land consolidation officials involved. The strength of the courts was traced to Golds' firm stand and steady indifference to complaints of demarcation inaccuracies.[38] This further aggravated an already precarious situation characterised by discontentment. These grievances continue to inform land issues in independent Kenya.

The supposed benefits of land consolidation and registration were not realized by many households in Kiambu District as fragmentation and parcelisation started even before the process was completed in the district. By 1960, the Kiambu Land Control Board (LCB) was facing pressure from people who demanded to have their land sub-divided.[39] Land shortage and pressure was particularly pervasive in Gatundu division. In the face of increasing population, the LCB was compelled to authorise fragmentation of land into units that were less than the four-acre threshold recommended during the consolidation process less than five years previously.

Arguably, the consolidation process was a self-defeating exercise in a number of ways. First, at independence, about 23 percent of rural households in Central

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[36] Kitching, *Class and Economic Change*, p. 326.

[37] Sorrenson, *Land Reform*, p. 118.

[38] *Ibid.*, p 207.

[39] KNA/DC/KBU/1/47: Kiambu District Annual Report 1960. The LCB oversees all land transactions in a division or a district. The local DO chairs the LCB whose members include chiefs, village elders, a physical planner and surveyors.

Province, which included Kikuyuland, were landless.[40] Second, the land reform had invariably benefitted the more influential members at the expense of such groups as the *ahoi*, who lost access to land through unjust practices. Thirdly, in 1964, the Central Province *Economic Survey* showed that nearly 41 percent of households in Kiambu were not working on any land at all.[41] This suggested that titling and provisioning of extension services was not a pre-requisite for the development of land as was envisaged in the Swynnerton Plan.

The Plan succeeded in creating a landed gentry and a land hungry peasantry. The dispossession of the *ahoi* was based on the assumption that the landless would be proletarianised and absorbed into the society either as artisans or farm hands. But by the late 1950s, the landless people spearheaded calls for redistribution of land in the White Highlands. The politicisation of the land question became particularly explosive in the years immediately preceding independence and was compounded by the release of 60,000 Mau Mau detainees (many of whom had no land) and by the coincident insurgency of the underground Kenya Land Freedom Army and *Kiama kia Muingi*.[42] White settlers and government bureaucrats alike feared a wave of land seizures following independence. To pre-empt land grabs and possible revolt against the new government, portions of the former White Highlands were added to the reserves from 1961 under the Million Acre Scheme.

The Million Acre Scheme, 1961-71

The Million Acre Scheme (MAS) refers to the land settlement programme initiated on the eve of Kenya's independence. It was called so because nearly one million acres of land were bought from white settlers for the settlement of Africans. Between July and September 1962, the colonial authorities and the African elite negotiated the transfer

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[40] Paul Collier and Deepak Lal, *Labour and Poverty in Kenya 1900-1980* (Oxford: Clarendon 1986), p.153.

[41] Quoted in Kitching, *Class and Economic Change*, p. 379.

[42] Shem Migot-Adholla, 'Rural Development Policy and Equality' in Joel Barkan and John Okumu (eds.), *Politics and Public Policy in Kenya and Tanzania* (New York: Praeger, 1979), p. 159.

of white settler land into the hands of Africans and the requisite compensation.[43] This was a programme that involved the settlement of 3,500 smallholder families to more than one million acres of largely high-density settlement schemes.[44] This arrangement took cognisance of the landless African population whose livelihood would be guaranteed through access to land. Evidently, the constitutional arrangement that was adopted at independence represented an effort by the British government to ensure that the white settlers remained a favoured group in Kenya. The resettlement programme therefore made a substantial number of concessions to the settlers.[45] European interests in the resolution of the land question in Kenya have therefore remained important.

An international aid programme with funds from the World Bank and the Colonial Development Corporation (CDC) was negotiated to finance the MAS. This was not only designed to facilitate inter-racial land transfer but also to assure European settlers of a continued market in land. The idea was to make land transfer an economic proposition by combining it with a programme for the intensification of agriculture in selected parts of the former White Highlands. The government provided loans to Africans to buy land from settlers who wished to divest from agriculture. With the provision of farm development loans and extension services, Africans were expected to venture into commercial farming.[46]

Realising the inevitability of the transfer of political power to Africans, white settlers sought assurances for their agricultural investments from Jomo Kenyatta (then the most popular African leader). In August 1963, Prime Minister Kenyatta assured a meeting of settlers in Nakuru that his government would respect their land rights. He told them, 'If I have done wrong to you it is for you to forgive me. If you have done

[43] Christopher Leo, *Land and Class in Kenya* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1984), p. 73.

[44] *Ibid.* p. 95.

[45] Christopher Leo, 'Who Benefited from the Million Acre Scheme? Toward a Class Analysis of Kenya's Transition to Independence', *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 15, 2 (1981), p.215.

[46] Leo, *Land and Class,* p. 73.

wrong to me it is for me to forgive you. We want you to stay and farm this country'.[47] Such statements made Kenyatta popular among white settlers and in the capitalist world. His position that Africans should buy land from settlers on a willing-seller-willing-buyer basis gained him popularity even among his former persecutors compared to proponents of socialism led by Oginga Odinga. The latter group advocated seizure of settler land and its redistribution for free to landless Africans.[48] Inevitably, the Kenyatta state became the guardian of British capital in the country.

Under the MAS, land was dispensed through high- and low-density schemes. The high-density scheme was designed to relieve population pressure in the densely populated African reserves. It targeted non-elite farmers who were allocated 27 acres of land each. Under this scheme, households were expected to earn an annual income of between £25 and £70, enough for family upkeep and repayment of the resettlement loan.[49] To some extent, the scheme benefitted the landless, the unemployed and former Mau Mau followers. The low-density scheme was designed for those Africans who had demonstrated agricultural ability (yeomen) and could raise some capital on their own to put the land to profitable use.[50] This scheme targeted some 1,800 farmers who already had experience in farming and were expected to earn an income of at least £250 or more per annum after deduction of the loan repayment charges.[51]

Politically, the yeomen farmers, who mainly existed among the Kikuyu were expected foster stability in the country. It was left to the government of independent Kenya to figure out how the peasants would find the money for repaying their loans.[52] The low-

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[47] Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary* (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1981), p. 88.

[48] Henry Bienen, *Kenya: The Politics of Participation and Control* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), pp. 161, 162.

[49] Kitching, *Class and Economic Change*, p. 316.

[50] Yeomen farmers were the progressive farmers with good knowledge of agriculture who could easily repay the loans advanced to them for the purchase of land.

[51] Leo, Land *and Class in Kenya*, p. 136.

[52] *Ibid.*

density scheme was filled with households whose heads depended mainly on off-farm incomes. By 1971, it was estimated that 29,000 families had been settled on high-density plots and 5,000 on larger low-density plots.[53]

The resettlement programme offered a realistic approach to the African land problem for both landless people and the more prosperous prospective settlers. It also reflected the continuing primacy of European interests in the resolution of the land question.[54] On paper the MAS was a novel idea. But its implementation proved quite difficult as it failed to address the problems of the poor while encouraging speculative buying of land, thereby creating a landed gentry. In the remainder of this chapter we focus on the ramifications of both the consolidation process and the resettlement schemes.

Resettlement remained a preoccupation of the post-colonial state at independence and in the subsequent period. The MAS was perceived by the Kikuyu middle class as a form of counter-insurgency or 'letting the steam out of the kettle'.[55] The purposes for resettlement were twofold. First, it was a government's response to rising demand to resettle people who had not been allocated land in the former reserves. As Throup observes, with the opening of the White Highlands, Kenyatta was able to divert the commercial farming ambitions of the Kikuyu from their overcrowded reserves where they might have generated strong opposition from subordinate members of the lineages who were being rendered landless.[56] Accordingly, the government's major goal was to stage a high visibility settlement on former European-held farms by people who were mostly landless and unemployed. Second, the government seized this opportunity to gain political mileage by strengthening a group of middle-sized farmers who were settled on the schemes. This meant resettling farmers who could

[53] Quoted in Colin Leys, *Underdevelopment in Kenya: The Political Economy of Neo-Colonialism* (London: Heinemann, 1975), p. 75.

[54] Leo, *Land and Class in Kenya,* p. 95.

[55] Wasserman, 'The Independence Bargain', pp. 116, 117.

[56] David Throup, 'Elections and Political Legitimacy in Kenya', *Africa*, 63, (1993), p. 382.

afford to buy large farms at the expense of the poor. That way the government was able to reward its powerful supporters.

The MAS had three main effects. First, it was expected that labourers who had worked on European farms would receive priority for resettlement. Labourers who had worked for four or more years were supposed to stay. But in practice land was allocated on the basis of ethnicity, leading to the settlement of about 40 percent of the migrant labourers.[57] Consequently, only a small proportion of the Kikuyu obtained land in the former White Highlands, which was taken up by Kalenjin and Kisii settlers. The return of Kikuyu squatters to Kiambu District exacerbated existing congestion, resulting in unending land disputes.[58]

Second, although the MAS was popularised as a measure to 'Africanise' the former White Highlands, the entire scheme left between three-quarters and four-fifths of the white settler farms intact. The goal of the outgoing colonial regime to 'Africanise' the White Highlands without affecting the patterns of resource distribution was thus fundamentally achieved. The MAS reflected the continuing primacy of European interests in the resolution of the land question.[59] The government justified the keeping large farms intact by arguing that they were of a higher level of efficiency than small ones. Consequently, by 1968, the subdivision of large farms was 'effectively abandoned'. [60]

Most of the land earmarked for resettlement in the former White Highlands under the MAS, including in Thika District, was taken up by the political elite. Like the Swynnerton Plan, the MAS was intended to counter the Kenya Land Freedom Army and *Kiama kia Muingi* as well as stem rural unrest on the eve of independence. Failure by the MAS to address land problems in Kenya led to the launch of other resettlement

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[57] Bienen, *Kenya*, p.152.

[58] *Ibid.*

[59] Leo, *Land and Class in Kenya*, p.95.

[60] Migot-Adhola, 'Rural Development and Policy', p.160.

projects like *haraka, shirika* and Ol Kalau schemes.[61] Of specific relevance to Thika District was the *Haraka* Settlement Scheme.

The *Haraka* Settlement Scheme, 1964 - 1975

As mentioned above, Thika District had some of leading white-owned sisal plantations in Kenya. However, from the 1960s, the sisal market was on a downward spiral, forcing many farmers to abandon their farms or resort to ranching. This induced the government adopt a policy of acquiring such farms through the Special Commissioner for Squatters for resettling the landless. To begin with, farms that were 40 acres or more in size were acquired for allocation to squatters. With time, even farms below 20 acres in size were acquired for rehabilitation in what came to be referred as *haraka* (quick) settlement scheme.[62] Squatters were allocated 10-acre plots each under this scheme.

The *haraka* settlement scheme was constrained by resistance from squatters who did not trust the government to resettle them. In 1964, for example, the Thika District Agricultural Committee experienced fierce resistance from squatters in its attempt to take control of its newly-acquired land on Fools Valley Farm. Similarly, M. K. Frost, the DAO, reported to the Nairobi Committee of the Central Agricultural Board (under which Thika was then administered) that 'the Kahawa Quarries, Kentiles Limited and Destro's Farm new squatter houses were built weekly, that the area was fast developing into a rural slum rife with criminal activities'.[63] This underscores some people's desire to acquire some land by any means.

After overcoming the initial hurdles, some land was taken over by the government for resettlement of squatters. In Thika District, four *haraka* schemes were started at Ngoliba, Munyu, Ndula and Gatuanyaga. All the schemes allocated ex-squatters an average of 2.5 hectares of land per household. The Ngoliba 'A' scheme, was the

[61] Hazlewood, *The Economy of Kenya*, p.33.

[62] KNA/QVL/3/69: Thika District Agricultural Committee Meetings 1964.

[63] *Ibid.* Thika was then administered through the Nairobi City Council.

oldest, having been launched in 1966. Under it, 163 plots were carved out of 405 hectares. The Munyu scheme had 499 plots while Ndula had 14 plots in an area of 56 hectares. The Gatuanyaga scheme, which was started in 1976, comprised 551 plots.[64] The beneficiaries of the schemes were the landless, who were mainly ex-squatters on white-owned farms and a few people from the neighbouring Kiambu District. The implementation of the *haraka* schemes experienced similar hurdles to the Swynnerton Plan and the MAS. Many squatters complained of favouritism leading to allocation of large plots to some individuals while the majority of households got plots of less than two acres each.[65] Both the Swynnerton Plan and the settlement programmes were intended to resolve land problems in African communities, but the extent to which this objective was realised remains debatable. By the late 1970s, various attempts had been made to solve the land problems associated colonial land policies. But the land issue was far from being resolved. In the next section, we focus on the underlying problems of the politics of land distribution and consolidation in Thika District.

The Effects of Land Reforms, 1954 – 2000

Through the Trust Land Act, the independent constitution gave the president powers to allocate trust lands for public use. These powers were supposed to be exercised in consultation with the local councils. Since independence, however, Kenya's presidents have consistently abused these powers often bypassing the local councils when allocating trust land and by allocating land for political patronage. In this section, we address the issue of inequitable distribution of land and how it sowed the seeds of poverty in Thika District.

In this chapter we have shown how in the independence bargain, the state placated the radicals and guaranteed the safety of foreign capital. As noted in the previous chapter, the radical wing of Kanu was vanquished as the moderates in the party adopted modern ways and sacrificed economic redistribution and social empowerment on the altar of capitalism. By guaranteeing the inalienability of private property, the demands

[64] RoK, *Kiambu District Development Plan 1979-83* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1979), p.14.

[65] KNA/VQ/10/38: Land Consolidation Complaints 1977.

and claims of squatters were squashed and shattered. To date the same law is applied in the frequent eviction and harassment of those who demand land rights. From the outset, Kenyatta opposed the idea of land distribution because it went against the grain of his own values as a capitalist. This was despite his government's pronouncement in 1965 that Kenya would pursue an African socialist development path. The political elite, of course, stood to gain economically if it stepped into the existing economic system rather than dismantle it.[66] Those who criticised the Kenyatta government's policies of furthering a dominant elite and the dispossession of the landless had no options other than quit the government. A few decided to fight the government on behalf of the masses outside mainstream politics and ended up in detention.

In 1966, for example, Vice-President Oginga Odinga resigned from government citing ideological differences with Kenyatta. Odinga and his supporters then formed the Kenya People's Union (KPU) opposition party, which agitated for nationalization and an overhaul of the socio-economic structure of the country. Although KPU's main base was Nyanza Province, it was supported by a section of the Kikuyu who were dissatisfied with the Kenyatta government. Bildad Kaggia, the deputy leader of the KPU, for example was a Kikuyu from Murang'a District whose politics appealed mainly to the poorer sections of the community.[67] The government neutralized KPU by denying its supporters trade licenses and access to loans from state financial institutions. In 1969, KPU was proscribed and its leaders were detained. Kenya then became a *de facto* single party state that gradually degenerated into authoritarianism under which patronage networks were firmly entrenched. It is against this background that we address the issue of access to land in the next section.

Kenya's land question is politically sensitive and shrouded in mystery because reliable data on land ownership is extremely difficult to access. What is available is either too scanty to offer a comprehensive picture of the land situation. Although law requires that all land transactions be registered with the commissioner of lands,

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[66] Bienen, *Kenya*, p. 164.

[67] *Ibid.* pp. 69, 70.

records on such transactions are closed to public scrutiny. Moreover, patron-client relationships involving land make it difficult to tell who owns what land.[68] However, from the information available, we can argue that inequality and impoverishment were the chief results of land transactions in Thika District during the first three decades of independence.

Kenyatta and the new political and economic elite used their positions and connections to acquire huge tracts of land in Thika District. They bought out white landowners and they entrenched themselves as the new land aristocrats. This was perfected by Kenyatta's ability to reward his allies, co-opt potential critics and silence serious and organised opposition. These practices stifled calls for land redistribution.[69] Accordingly, Kenyatta's family and close supporters, in particular the Kiambu Kikuyu elite, emerged as the main beneficiaries of this kind of patronage.[70] This form of primitive accumulation saw the amassing of huge chunks of land on one hand and the marginalisation of the masses on the other.

Most of the coffee and sisal estates in the former eastern White Highlands fell into the hands of the Kenyatta family in the 1960s. For instance, Socfinaf, one of the large coffee and sisal estates in Thika District during the colonial period, 'sold' a portion of their land to two sons of the president, Muigai and Magana Kenyatta.[71] The land may have been 'sold' because it was private property, but the whole land consolidation process was funded by the British government through a loan that the government was supposed to repay. Through such arrangements, Kenyatta and his associates became very rich and powerful. Whether they ever repaid the government guaranteed loans is not clear.

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[68] Gerrishon Ikiara and Arne Tostensen, 'The Political Economy of Poverty Reduction in Kenya' (A Report for the Chr. Michelsen Institute, SIDA: 1996), p. 31.

[69] Frank Holmquist and Michael Ford, 'Kenya: Slouching Toward Democracy', *Africa Today*, 39, 3 (1992), p. 98.

[70] Joel Barkan and Michael Chege, 'Decentralising the State: District Focus and the Politics of Reallocation in Kenya', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 27, 3 (1989), p. 437.

[71] KNA/QVL/3/69: Thika District Agricultural Committee Meetings 1964.

The paradox of primitive accumulation became even more complex following Kenyatta's call to Kenyans to go back to the land. In the late 1960s, Kenyatta introduced the clarion call of *turudi mashambani* (let us go back to the land).[72] He implored those without employment in the urban areas to go back to the land, which he equated to 'the greatest asset, heritage and culture.'[73] This was sheer rhetoric as many people in urban areas had no land to go back to. Indeed it was the lack of arable land that had caused the rural-urban migration that Kenyatta was trying to discourage.[74]

The unabated process of primitive accumulation included acquisition of large tracts of uncultivated land and operational farms including the 38 hectares hived off the Kikuyu Escarpment Forest in Kiambu District by the first lady, Mama Ngina Kenyatta, in the 1960s.[75] Another 36 hectares of the same forest in Thika District was allocated to her in 1980 and another 24-hectare parcel of land was allocated in 1993.[76] Part of the land on which Kenyatta and Jomo Kenyatta universities stand formerly belonged to the Basil Criticos, a white settler in Thika. This land was acquired by the government in 1972 under the Settlement Transfer Fund Scheme and was later donated to the two universities. Recently the two universities paid the market price for the land to the Kenyatta family.

Indeed, if the transfer of the Eastern White Highlands, in particular the white settler farms in Thika which the British had underwritten is to be looked at under the prism of transfer only an inconsequential amount of land was transferred to Africans. Overall, the settlement authorities skimped deplorably on the resources that were

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[72] J. Gertzel, Maure Goldscmidt and Donald Rothchild, *Government and Politics in Kenya: A Nation Building Text* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1969), p. 499.

[73] *Ibid.*

[74] Macharia Kinuthia, 'Slum Clearance and the Informal Economy in Nairobi', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 30, 2 (1992), pp. 221-36.

[75] Ndun'gu Report Annexes cited in *Daily Nation* 17 December 2004.

[76] *Ibid.*

allocated to high-density settlers. The vast majority of land allocated under the MAS, both in Thika and in the Rift Valley, was taken up to settle the wealthier or yeoman farmers. Yet this category of farmers could afford to purchase the land, unlike to the poor, who deserved to be settled by the government.

Traversing through Thika, one notices vast acres of idle land much of which belongs to the Kenyatta family.[77] A large number of Kenyatta's extended family members and others profited by their favoured positions. By 1974, criticism of Kenyatta's *modus operandi*, the nepotism, favouritism and in-group corruption-became more open, particularly as growing economic hardship plagued the country.[78] Essentially, these family dealings involved the use of presidential influence to obtain farm properties, among other things. Meanwhile, seizures of land intended for smallholder farms became widespread at the end of the Kenyatta era. Land speculation by groups of wealthy Kenyans, afforded them access to tracts of government land instead of going to the landless population as was envisaged in the resettlement programme.[79] The following case illustrates this point.

A recent report on land grabbing in Kenya incriminated the Kenyatta family for illegally amassing land. The Kenyatta family controls an estimated 500,000 hectares or the size of Nyanza Province, which has been shared out as follows. The family owns: 29, 000 acres in Kahawa Sukari, 10,000 acre Gicheha Farm in Gatundu division, 5,000 acres in Thika division, 9,000 acres in Kasarani (Nairobi), and 5,000 acres in Muthaiti, Brookside Farm, Green Lee Estate and Njagu Farm in Juja, Muiri, Kiriti and Gathecha Farms, all located in Thika district.[80] The expansion of the

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[77] KNA/MA/2/84: Thika Divisional Land Board Minutes and General Land Disputes 1966-84.

[78] Norman Miller, *Kenya: The Quest for Prosperity* (Boulder, Colo:, Westview Press 1984), pp.50, 51.

[79] *Ibid.*, p.58.

80 According to estimates by independent surveyors and Ministry of Lands officials who spoke on condition of anonymity and reported in the *East African Standard* 1 October 2004.The acreage quoted in this report is not extracted from official government records. There are few and those that exist are scattered and some cases

Kenyatta family's land was at the expense of other residents of Thika. Owing to the vast acreage of the land in the hands of the Kenyatta's, for a long time they have been able to use them as collateral to secure huge bank loans, mortgages and other commercial investments.[81] It was only in the 1980s that the Kenyattas started to subdivide the vast tracts into plots that were later sold to landless people or potential developers at market rates.[82] Land which was acquired for free is returned to the residents or others at hefty prices. The injustices in land ownership were made possible by the existing legislation. For instance, the calls for the imposition of a land ownership ceiling and redistribution have remained rhetorical in both the Kenyatta and Moi eras.

The Kiambu District Development Plan of 1979 revealed inequitable distribution of land and increasing congestion on the limited arable land. According to the Plan, 50 percent of all 'Africanised' land in Kiambu district, which had a population of 686,000, was owned by only 183 individuals with the leading 44 holding two thirds of the land.[83] This class comprised local politicians, senior civil servants, businessmen and executives of parastatals.[84] Table 2.1 shows land distribution among various sectors in Kiambu district in 1980.

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incomplete, but estimates are based on close to a year of interviews with farm staff, independent surveyors, experts from the Ministry of Lands and land rights NGOs.

[81] KNA/MA/2/70: Thika Divisional Land Control Board: Minutes and General Land Disputes 1987-90.

[82] *Ibid.*

[83] Hunt, *The Impending Crisis in Kenya*, p.288.

[84] *Ibid.*

Table 2.1 Land Use Categories in Kiambu District in 1980[85]

Type of holding	Estimated area (ha)	Estimated no of holdings	Average size of holding (ha)
Small scale	86,000	72,620	1.2
Large scale	80,000	478	170
Settlements	21,000	1,700	4.5
Forest	45,000	9	5,000
Others (roads, centres)	45,000	-	Na
Total	257,000	-	

Smallholders own plots as small as 1.2 ha whereas the large holdings average 170 ha which indicates a marked disparity. Without land most of the residents are left struggling to survive. Most of the landless were relegated to the villages that had been set aside in the 1950s for the *ahoi* and land poor but with time proved inadequate. In these villages, for instance, more than one family shared a plot of 0.25 hectares.[86] The villagers formed a labour depot for surrounding large farm owners but with the slump in agriculture that Kenya has been experiencing since the 1980s, the labourers were exposed to miseries of sporadic unemployment. The land reforms never yielded the anticipated results of economic prosperity for the landed and the landless. The above situation in Kiambu is accurately captured by Toulmin and Quan, who insist that the introduction of individualised titles benefitted powerful private interest, creating opportunities for land concentration in the hands of political and other elites, with few safeguards for the non-formalised land rights of rural communities.[87]

For those with smallholdings fragmentation became inevitable. Parcelisation or fragmentation of land into uneconomic units was traced to the age-old custom of passing on land from one generation to the next. For instance, children who were born

[85] RoK, *Kiambu District Development Plan 1979-83* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1979), p.14.

[86] *Ibid.* p.111.

[87] Toulmin, *Evolving Land Rights*, p.35.

when land consolidation took place were adults in the 1980s and in need of their own pieces of land. Subsequently, the initial four acres that were registered about four decades ago have been fragmented and reduced to pieces as small as 0.5 ha in recent years.[88] The continued process of parcelisation counters the benefits of land titling. That is, the farm sizes tend to be too small for the owners to use them as collateral to secure loan from commercial banks or other agricultural institutions. Yet, one of the key objectives of titling was to increase security of economic opportunities as title deed holders automatically became eligible for bank loans to invest in land. Over the years the credibility of a title deed as collateral has been undermined and presently security of tenure and owning a title deed is still not an automatic guarantee of getting a bank loan. The government appears not to recognise this although the National Development Plans uphold land as the main way through which credit for agricultural development can be obtained.[89]

Continued parcelisation of land compelled the government to address the issue in 1986 by means of the Sessional *Paper No. 1 of 1986 on Economic Management for Renewed Growth*. In part, it stated that 'subdivisions should be prevented beyond the point where returns from land begin to diminish.'[90] This implied that fragmentation was pervasive and it had also proved to be agriculturally unviable. Operating uneconomical units is associated with diminishing returns and overall declining value. However, legislation on the limits of subdivision sounds unrealistic, taking into account that Kenya observes sanctity of private property. Thus land owners are at liberty to do whatever they deem fit with their land, including subdivision. Moreover, the government has little control over ancestral land to which people have a sentimental attachment. Therefore the 1986 directive went unheeded. Available evidence shows that subdivision of land, a prerequisite for sales, dominates most land

[88] RoK, *Thika District Development Plan 1997-2001* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1997), p.20.

[89] RoK, National Development Plans, various years.

[90] RoK, *Sessional Paper No. 1 of 1986 on Economic Management for Renewed Growth* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1986), p.89.

transactions in the Thika district LCB.[91] Most landowners found the plots uneconomical and in many accounts they compared them to *rurimi rwa thia* (Kikuyu for the tongue of a gazelle).[92] There is no sign that there will be no further divisions of the already small parcels of land given the inelasticity of land vis a vis the ever rising population.

In the 1994-96 National Development Plan, the government emphasised the need to enhance prompt planning, surveying, adjudication, registration and issuance of title deeds.[93] The implementation of this directive was however been hampered by lethargy and red tape that characterise the operations of the LCBs countrywide. As recently as 2002, landowners in Thika decried the delay in the processing of title deeds and other related procedures.[94] Table 2.1 depicts the skewed distribution of land in the district.

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[91] KNA/MA/2/70: Thika Divisional Land Control Board: Minutes and General Land Disputes 1987-90.

[92] Personal Communication, Joseph Mungai, Kamwangi, 4 June 2002.

[93] RoK, *National Development Plan 1994-96* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1994a), p.99.

[94] RoK, *Thika District Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper* (Nairobi: Ministry of Finance and Planning, 2001), p.15.

Table 2.2 Distribution of Large-Scale Farms in Thika in 1997[95]

Division	No. of Farms	Ha
Municipality	16	4,406
Ruiru	61	7,560
Kakuzi	1	5,500
Gatanga	58	160
Gatundu	91	210
Kamwangi	1	200

The Thika, Ruiru and Kakuzi divisions have a disproportionate share of large farms. The multinational corporations (MNCs) such as that Cirio Del Monte Kenya Limited (CDKL), Kakuzi and Socfinaf retain huge tracts of land in different parts of the district. These multinational have contributed to the immiseration of a majority of households in Thika. Although these companies are purported to create employment for Kenyans, this is not entirely true (see chapters five and six).[96]

The land crisis in Thika is a microcosm of the Kenyan land situation, particularly in the high and medium potential zones. As already mentioned, the post-colonial state maintained that the large-scale sector had to be left intact because these farms played an important role the production of hybrid maize seed, coffee, tea, wheat and the breeding better livestock. On the other hand the smallholders occupy small plots as is shown in table 2.3 below.

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[95] RoK, *Thika District Development Plan1997*, p.21.

[96] *Daily Nation*, 22 April 2000.

Table: 2. 3 Distribution of Small-Scale Farms in Thika in 1997 [97]

Division	Agriculture ha	Rural household ha	Household per ha
Municipality	14,860	14,077	1.06
Ruiru	26,640	10,796	2.5
Kakuzi	46,200	16,850	2.7
Gatanga	16,500	15,087	0.5
Gatundu	20,100	26,400	0.76
Kamwangi	10,500	17,500	0.6

Land shortage was most severe in the high potential and medium zones located in the Gatanga, Kamwangi and Gatundu divisions. In the ecologically marginal areas, households owned an average of two hectares of land, compared to the high potential areas where households owned less than one hectare of land.

Available statistics do not show how many people are landless in the district, but this should not be taken to mean that it is not pervasive. During fieldwork, squatters and landless were identified as the major categories of the poor in the district. These people lived in rental houses in shopping centres or on the estates (see chapter six and seven). Left with no choice, the landless cultivate along riverbanks, as was evident in parts of Gatundu and Kamwangi divisions.[98] As a consequence the rivers were drying up and gulley soil erosion was a persistent environmental problem in these areas. This suggests a link between land poverty and environmental degradation.

Illegal squatting either in hazardous places or on private property in Thika has been commonplace since the 1970s.[99] People from the densely populated divisions such as Gatundu encroach on private property in the neighbouring idle land, mainly belonging

[97] *Ibid.,* p.20.

[98] KNA/AMC/4/3: Thika District Development Committee 1984.

[99] KNA/MA/7/9: Land Consolidation Complaints 1972.

to the local elites. The amassing of land in the hands of MNCs continues to cause acrimony among the residents of Thika and politicians, with the latter at times inciting residents to invade private property. In April 2000, the then Member of Parliament (MP) for Juja, Ruiru division, incited people to invade these estates which covered more than 100,000 acres of land.[100] However, this call could not go far taking into account that squatting is illegal in Kenyan law which sanctifies and protects private property.[101]

It is also critical to note that with land titling, gender relations in regard to land ownership put women in a subservient place. Titling was done in favour of males. This was in line with patriarchy which exhibited male bias in the distribution of resources.[102] Women were placed firmly in a position of economic subordination whereby they have no control over the land, produce or management of other resources. Women were relegated to the role of mere users of land, but not legal owners. The marginalisation of women was compounded by the tendency of male relatives to dispose of ancestral land without the consent of other family members. Although there is a presidential decree that requires women and children to give their consent before agricultural land is disposed of, cases of families deprived of land by such unsanctioned land sales were commonly reported in the district.[103] Again, in the wake of migration of men to urban areas, women had to devise mechanisms to enable them fulfill their productive and reproductive responsibilities.[104] Chapter eight pays

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[100] *Daily Nation* 19 April 2000.

[101] Section 75 in the Bill of Rights deals explicitly with land as the major form of property rights in Kenya and it also protects property against compulsory acquisition by the state without compensation.

[102] April Gordon, *Transforming Capitalism and Patriarchy: Gender and Development in Africa* (London: Lynne Rienner, 1996), p.90.

[103] KNA/VQ/10/41: Land Complaints; KNA/MA/2/70: Thika Divisional Land Control Board: Minutes and General Land Disputes 1987-90.

[104] Betty Potash, 'Women in the Changing African Family' in Margaret Hay and Sharon Stichter, (eds.) *African Women South of the Sahara* (Harlow, Essex: Longman Scientific & Technical, 1995), p.73.

detail to how males and females respond differently to situations of deprivation, a strategy that is largely influenced by the resources at their disposal.

Finally, frequent administrative changes in the district boundaries have brought several problems to those seeking land title deeds or any form of assistance from the District Lands Office. In many cases, landowners are often referred from one LCB office to another, located either in Thika, Kamwangi or Kiambu. Most of the people who were interviewed narrated their bad experiences with LCB offices. Although informants did not easily admit to having given bribes to the clerks, it was a common practice. I personally went to the land registry in Thika to make my observations and asked for a search for a piece of land in Ruiru division. I had to spend the whole day at the office, only to be referred to the Ministry of Land headquarters in Nairobi.

The Thika land office was congested, understaffed and most people were easily dismissed and told that their files were 'missing' until and unless they gave a bribe or *kitu kidogo.* Indeed, according to a recent *Report on the Commission of Inquiry into Land Law System,* the Ministry of Lands ranks amongst the most corrupt government ministries.[105] The lethargy that characterises land cases epitomises the corrupt public sector in Kenya. Land registries are still run manually, rendering the process slow and inefficient. Many times land owners were informed that their files were missing, a conduit used by clerks to extort bribes from citizens.[106] Disillusioned landowners opted to seek justice in the traditional land courts which take a shorter time to resolve disputes compared to formal courts. Although the provincial administration and the politicians are aware of the severity of the land shortage, their efforts to ameliorate the problem bear minimum results. In many instances these efforts did not go beyond incitement. They seldom commit themselves to implement sustainable land policies.

In this chapter we have traced the evolution of various types of land tenure. Under the framework of the pre-colonial Kikuyu land tenure rights of access to land and resources for all members of the society were established. This tenure was shattered

[105] RoK, *Report on the Commission of Inquiry into Land Law System,* pp.102, 104.

[106] *Ibid.* p.76.

by colonial land alienation policies. In the colonial political economy, there emerged on the one hand, a wealthy class of landowners and on the other, a class of Africans who, if not entirely landless, lacked sufficient land to meet their cash and consumption needs. The latter relied on family labour and subsistence production to satisfy basic consumption needs. With time squatters were even denied grazing rights which they had previously enjoyed, prompting more protests, mainly in the Rift Valley. Since the 1950s various land reforms have been implemented but there is little to show in terms of equity and access to land, particularly among the poor in Thika.

The land reforms have been propelled by a political logic which has undermined the realisation of real land redistribution The Swynnerton Plan markedly failed because its short-term objective was to counter the Mau Mau insurgency. The long-term objective was to build an elite class of progressive farmers who would form a solid conservative bulwark against rural revolt and political opposition. The educated elite established claims to uncultivated land, hence muting the voices of the weaker members of the community. This bears out Kanogo's observation "that it was enough to destroy white supremacy but not enough to realise the peasant dream".[107] The post-colonial state has largely pursued and consolidated the changes wrought by the Swynnerton plan. The independent constitution bestowed upon the president much power over land which Presidents Kenyatta and Moi abused for patronage purposes. The Kenyatta family and close associates own vast acreages of idle and fallow land in the most prime areas. During the two regimes the black elite established political networks that were sealed with land deals. Lack of a ceiling on land holdings made it easy for the political and economic elite to hoard land through speculative buying.

The poor are squeezed onto small plots, particularly in the marginal lands. The upper zones of Kamwangi and Gatundu experience the highest population density and are also heavily congested. Progressive fragmentation of holdings has been an important contributory factor to poverty in Thika. A drop in agricultural productivity is associated with the parcelisation of land. Whilst it was envisaged in the Swynnerton Plan that the landless would form a labouring class engaged in employment on larger holdings or in villages, this was not realised. Transcending poverty and deprivation

[107] Kanogo, *Squatters*, p.181.

can be guaranteed through land allocation or redistribution because it overcomes the problems of abiding food insecurity. In the next chapter food insecurity, a crucial manifestation and consequence of diminishing returns on land is addressed.

CHAPTER THREE

FOOD INSECURITY: TRANSFORMATION IN SUBSISTENCE FARMING IN THIKA DISTRICT, 1953-2000

The issue of food security has become paramount in poverty-related studies. Food security exists when all people, at all times, have access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.[1] The essential elements of this definition are the emphasis on both the demand (access) and the supply (availability) of food. Food insecurity is simply the lack of access to enough food. There are two types of food insecurity, transitory and chronic.

Transitory food insecurity is a temporary decline or shortage in a country's or household's and/or region within the country's access to enough food. Chronic food insecurity is prolonged absence of food as a result of poverty. These shortages may result from instability in food production, food prices and incomes. Although food shortage is not a new phenomenon in Thika district, in the last few decades cases of food insecurity and the attendant malnutrition have been on the increase.

Thika district experiences both transitory and chronic forms of food insecurity. In particular, the eastern part of the district normally experiences erratic rainfall resulting in frequent droughts and famine. The situation is compounded by lack of inputs, improper planning and prohibition of consumption of certain foods among some of the communities. Further, in the absence of viable marketing facilities and proper organisational skills at all levels of production, agricultural output has been on the decline in the last two decades. The reduction in production levels has a direct impact on livelihoods of most farmers who in most cases do not have alternative sources of income.

Agriculture is the primary means of livelihood for the residents of rural Thika. In 2002 an estimated 85,700 of the 171,713 households in Thika derived their livelihood

[1] Rome Declaration and World Food Summit Plan of Action, November 1996.

from agricultural production.[2] Land acreage ranges from 0.5 to 2.7 hectares in smallholdings and 200 to 4,046 hectares in largeholdings.[3] Smallholdings and largeholdings occupied 31,873 and 49,938 hectares, respectively.[4] Ranches in the Kakuzi and Ruiru (formerly settled by white farmers) areas occupy another 1,200 hectares. Smallholders grow subsistence crops such as maize, beans, potatoes, sorghum, cassava and a variety of fruits and vegetables. They also grow pineapples, tobacco and cotton, though on a small scale.

The agriculture sector in the district is composed of two groups: large and small scale farmers. The state's agrarians policies have promoted the interests of large farms and the more progressive strata of smallholders (the upper 60 percent), while the lower strata of smallholders (the bottom 40 percent) have been neglected. Agricultural development in post-independence Kenya has featured two trends. One, there is the group of capitalists who own large farms and have easy access to state resources which they have been able to appropriate. Two, there is a growing number of economically successful smallholders whose have acquired their resources out of production of profitable commodities. The data are sketchy, but there are indications that inequities are increasing within the smallholder sector. While more small farmers are better off, many remain poor. Rapid growth within the smallholder sector has generated a pattern of uneven and inequitable development.

Currently, agricultural production in Thika is floundering. This is a theme which is particularly pertinent to the contemporary African experience and context, especially as it pertains to the issue of food deficit that continues to confront the district. Various explanations have been proffered as to why Africa is still faced with a food crisis: "inappropriate" public policy options, poor levels of mechanisation; and inadequate market mechanisms and institutions, among others. Irrespective of the particular view

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[2] Republic of Kenya (RoK), *Thika District Development Plan 2002-2008* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 2002), p.27.

[3] RoK, *Thika District Development Plan 1997-2000* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1997), p.21.

[4] RoK, *Thika District Development Plan 2002*, p.8.

which may be taken, one issue is clearly not in dispute: the poor performance of the African agricultural sector is not a self-evident matter and a solution to it is yet to be found.

This chapter traces the development of small-scale farming from the mid-1950s to 2000. The chapter is divided into three sections. The co-operative movement and other institutions that supported agricultural development are covered in the first section. The second section addresses the performance of the subsistence sector during the transition period between 1963 and 1980. Finally, constraints facing farmers in the era of liberalisation are examined.

The Transition Period, 1953-63

As already mentioned in chapters one and two, in the colonial period the settler economy was nurtured at the expense of African commodity production. Accordingly, agricultural extension, credit and marketing services were only available for the settler farmers. Belatedly, Africans were allowed to grow cash crops in the late 1950s, with the exception of Meru and Kisii areas where coffee farming was started in 1933. This notwithstanding the growing of maize, wattle and dairy farming was underway in most parts of central Kenya in the 1930s.[5] This is consistent with evidence provided by Cowen, who traces the historical origins of the first indigenous proto-capitalists classes in Kiambu from their incipient involvement in agriculture.[6] Among the proto-capitalists were the chiefs, elders and the educated, who using wages accrued from formal employment they invested in farming. Also, peasant farmers particularly women grew subsistence crops to feed their families as well as supplement the meagre wages paid to their husbands in the towns or on commercial farms.[7] In the settled areas, the workers were allocated small plots of land on which they grew food crops (see chapter five). Revenues from commodity production marked the basis of

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[5] KNA/PC/CP/9/8/15: Central Province Annual Report 1930.

[6] Michael Cowen, 'Commodity Production in Kenya's Central Province' in Judith Heyer, Roberts Pepe and Williams Gavin (eds.) *Rural Development in Tropical Africa* (London: Macmillan, 1981), p.124.

[7] *Ibid.*

differentiation among the Kikuyu of Kiambu.[8] Kitching demonstrates how the *athomi* (Kikuyu for the educated or readers), comprising chiefs, tribunal elders and the educated minority, purchased land from the non-progressive classes. Subsequently, with large farms and higher agricultural productivity this group formed the incipient class of capitalists.[9] Land claims of junior kin and non-kin dependents were overlooked by the senior *mbari* members leading, to strife and conflicts.10 In light of this, social heterogeneity among the Kikuyu became accentuated.

In the 1950s petty commodity production in the Thika native reserve was well developed. There was however some little disruption caused by the Mau Mau war. The disruption did not have much effect though farmers with newly-acquired titles 'had realised that they had everything to lose and nothing to gain from assisting the 'guerrillas'.[11] The internal commotion was compounded by the influx of ex-squatters who had been expelled from the Rift Valley. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, congestion on the land, soil erosion and poverty were quite evident by the 1950s. The growing pressure on land culminated in high malnutrition levels reported in the district at the end of the 1950s. In particular, children of the displaced ex-squatters suffered from kwashiorkor while a substantial number of adults faced starvation.[12] This was both a rural and urban problem. In the town of Thika, the Child Welfare Society of Kenya took up the responsibility to rehabilitate orphans and other malnourished children. In most of cases it was proved that these children normally originated from households that had no land to cultivate.[13] To overcome their

[8] *Ibid.*

[9] Gavin Kitching, *Class and Economic Change in Kenya: The Making of an African Petite Bourgeoisie 1905-1970* (New Haven Conn: Yale University Press, 1980), pp.451, 452.

[10] Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya and Africa: Book One: State and Class* (London: James Currey 1992), p.301.

[11] KNA/VQ/16/98: Thika District Annual Report 1955.

[12] KNA/PC/NZA/4/4/57: Central Province Annual Report 1953.

[13] KNA/VQ/16/4: Thika District Intelligence Reports 1949-1958.

immediate problems such destitute families were allowed to cultivate the vacant crown land around the town while some were encouraged to seek work in the neighbouring coffee farms. Nonetheless the district Welfare Officer dismissed the problem lightly and reported that 'destitution is not very much of a problem here [Thika] in comparison to New York City. Here we have fairly few cases'.[14] This marked the beginning of future food insecurity in the district.

The Emergence of Co-operative Societies

Kenya has a long history of primary co-operative societies which date back to the colonial period. Co-operative societies were formed as an avenue for rural development. The first co-operative was the Lumbwa Co-operative Society which was formed in 1908 by white farmers in the Rift Valley.[15] The Kenya Farmers Co-operative Union, a forerunner of the Kenya Farmers Association (KFA), was formed as a company in 1923. In 1931 the Co-operative Ordinance was enacted and thereafter KFA became a co-operative. Soon after, in 1933 the Thika Planters Co-operative Union, a precursor to the present day Kenya Planters Co-operative Union (KPCU), was formed. This was the foundation on which present day societies were to be built. The co-operative movement is hierarchical. At the bottom is a primary society, also commonly referred to as a co-operative, which is made up of individual members. Several primary societies in various divisions formed a district union. Several district unions make up the national union. The Kiambu Farmers Co-operative Union (hereafter Union) was formed in 1959 to co-ordinate the primary societies in the district. The first primary societies to be affiliated to the district union were Gatundu, Gatukuyu, Kiambaa, Komothai, Gititu and Kiamwangi. These were mainly coffee societies. Also affiliated to the Union was the Kiambu Dairy and Pyrethrum Society.

The Union provided credit facilities to the affiliated societies and it facilitated the marketing of most crops. Centralised accounting, bulk buying and insurance to the primary societies were other activities also undertaken by the Union on behalf of the primary societies. In 1964 the Kenya National Federation of Co-operatives (KNFC)

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[14] *Ibid.*

[15] Tabitha Kanogo, 'Co-operatives', in William Ochieng' (ed.) *Themes in Kenyan History* (London: James Currey, 1993), p.175.

was formed to co-ordinate the co-operative movement countrywide. In 1966 the Co-operative Act was enacted. Under the Act, the government exercised excessive control over the running of co-operatives.[16] In 1925 the Kenya Co-operative Creamery (KCC) was formed to promote milk production, processing and marketing on behalf of the farmers. The KCC exercised a monopoly over distribution and marketing of milk. Co-operative societies played a pivotal role in Kenya's agricultural development (see chapter four).

Agricultural Production in the Post-Colonial Period: Prospects and Problems

The Pre-Liberalisation Period 1963-1980

The emergence of the postcolonial state in 1963 did not mark a radical break with the past in relation to the structure and functioning of the state. The colonial structures were retained intact in terms of the provisioning of credit and extension service, which were biased towards the large-scale sector. The post-colonial state apparatus expanded in size and grew even more complex and further developed the scope and intricate specialisation of its predecessor. The state retained control over the structures of production and it augmented powers in most sectors of the economy. The state became the main agency through which economic policies were pursued with the creation of state enterprises.

Agricultural policy in Kenya from 1963 to early 1980s was dominated by government controls and subsidies. Pricing and marketing of commodities was controlled by state corporations and marketing boards while agricultural research and extension was highly subsidised. The government controlled producer prices which were in some cases well above the world market prices. To ensure continuity, official policy in the second National Development Plan 1966-70 envisaged 'to ensure that all farmers were encouraged to retain their holdings and should have access to regular government aids to farming, including agricultural credit and extension services'.[17]

[16] Yash Ghai, 'Co-operative Legislation in East Africa' in Carl Gosta Widstrand (ed.), *African Co-operatives and Efficiency* (Uppsala: The Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1972), pp.39-62.

[17] RoK, *National Development Plan 1966-70* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1966), p.158.

The government provided agricultural extension services which comprised the largest item in the Ministry of Agriculture's annual budget.[18] The heavy investment in extension services translated into rapid adoption of hybrid seeds, artificial insemination, and mechanisation.[19]

The state supported large scale farming, particularly in regard to advancement of credit facilities. For instance, the Guaranteed Minimum Return (GMR), a seasonal crop credit system, was channelled through the KFA. The GMR scheme provided credit and crop insurance to wheat and maize farmers with a minimum holding of 100 acres. Between 1954 and 1972, for instance, it was estimated that only 65,000 of Kenya's more than 1 million smallholders gained access to formal credit.[20] The extension services, too, were more in favour of the 'progressive' farmers.[21]

Although after independence the acreage for those who could benefit from the scheme was reduced to 15 acres, this was still very high an acreage for most residents of Thika who owned as little as 2.5 hectares of land. The district Union through the primary co-operative societies remained the main financier of the smallholders. There were two forms of credit facilities for the smallholder farmers. These were: the Co-operative Productive Credit Scheme (CPCS), and Integrated Agriculture Development Programme (IADP). The CPCS was exclusive to coffee farmers while the IADP invariably financed subsistence production. There was no clear-cut policy on how the loans were to be expended whilst loan applications and processing was at the discretion of the co-operative societies, as will become apparent in this chapter.

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[18] RoK, *Economic Survey 1970* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1970), pp.57, 58.

[19] KNA/MR/4/2: Crop Production Credit Scheme (CPCS) Loans 1968-73.

[20] Stephen Peterson, 'Neglecting the Poor: State Policy Toward the Smallholder in Kenya' in Stephen Commins, Michael Lofchie and Rhys Payne (eds.) *Africa's Agrarian Crisis: The Roots of Famine* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1985), p. 70.

[21] S.N. Hinga and Judith Heyer, 'The Development of Large Farms' in Judith Heyer, *et al.* (eds.) *Agricultural Development in Kenya: An Economic Assessment* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1976), p.248.

In 1968 a pilot project on what was then called Lindquist Credit Scheme was initiated in Kiambu district.[22] The ten primary societies in Kiambu district affiliated to the Union benefitted from this scheme. Seasonal loans were disbursed both in cash and kind. In principle the maximum amount of loan granted to a farmer was two-thirds of his three preceding years coffee produce. The advantage of the CPCS was that farm produce from the preceding three years served as collateral. Every loanee had to be guaranteed by another farmer in the same society. The loan was repayable in one year, no interest was charged in the first six months after which the loan attracted an interest of eight percent.[23] Farmers used the cash to develop their farms in diverse ways.

From about 1960 onwards the introduction of grade cattle was evident. The sale of milk and dairy produce from the African smallholdings gradually consolidated their profits. The process was remarkably accelerated from 1963 onwards by stock sales from European settlers leaving the country at the time. Gradually grade cattle replaced the zebu breed and high levels of productivity were experienced. By the mid-1960s, many of the households in Kiambu district had at least a cow or two which provided milk for the family and some surplus for sale.[24] Farmers obtained loans from the Union to purchase grade animals.[25] Training in dairy husbandry was a continuous process and the ready availability of veterinary and artificial insemination (AI) services facilitated the development of dairy farming in the area. The high milk production recorded in this period was reflective of a sector that was adequately supported. In 1968 the total milk production amounted to some 60 million gallons, 42 million gallons of this coming from large farms so that small-scale milk production accounted for 30 percent in the district.[26]

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[22] The scheme was appropriately named after Lindquist, the Nordic credit specialist who carried out the pilot project. In 1971 the scheme was renamed Co-operative Production Credit Scheme (CPCS).

[23] KNA/MR/4/2: Co-operative Productive Credit Scheme (CPCS) Loans 1968-1973.

[24] *Ibid.*

[25] KNA/MA/12/37: Kiambu District Annual Report 1965.

[26] KNA/MA/2/6: Kiambu District Annual Report 1969.

Income from cattle keeping augmented that of wattle. In the upper zones of Gatundu, the high prices enjoyed by green and stick wattle bark was a major source of household income in 1969.[27] It is in light of this that Kitching gives credence to farming as having accelerated the emergence of an indigenous bourgeoisie in Kiambu. He states that 'in Kiambu the largest farmers owned more of these "rare beasts" than any other group while in Nyeri and Embu ownership was concentrated in the middle ranges with a 'tailing-off on the largest farms'.[28] The Kiambu Dairy Union played a key role in facilitating the development of agriculture in the district.

By the end of the 1960s, the Union advanced as much as Sh. 500,000 to farmers in the district.[29] This capital was obtained from the Union and society's funds, credit facilities from suppliers of goods and the Co-operative Bank. The Co-operative Bank was formed in 1968 and it advanced loans to co-operatives countrywide. Deposits from members of the Union provided capital for loans to improve their coffee holdings as well as for use in crop diversification. Both short-and medium-term loans were advanced by the Union.

The success of the Lindquist pilot project led to its implementation farther afield in 1971 under a new name, the Co-operative Productive Credit Scheme (CPCS). Following the introduction of the CPCS, the Union Banking Sections (UBSs) were established to offer savings and credit services to members on behalf of the district Union.[30] Members of staff of the UBSs were responsible for assessing the credit-worthiness of farmers before processing their loan applications.[31] The UBSs operated from fixed premises or by use of mobile vans that reached different parts of the district. Some of the services rendered by the UBSs included provision of fertilisers,

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[27] *Ibid.*

[28] Kitching, *Class and Economic Change*, pp.333, 334.

[29] KNA/MR/4/2: Co-operative Productive Credit Scheme (CPCS) Loans 1968-1973.

[30] *Ibid.*

[31] *Ibid.*

seeds, plants, AI and veterinary services. Payment to coffee farmers was also made through the same units.

Evidence that farmers used credit to develop their farms was manifested in the rapid adoption of modern methods of farming such as the use of hybrid maize and widespread use of fertilisers. Up to the early 1970s Kiambu was the food basket for much of central and eastern Kenya. Expansive use of hybrid seeds resulted in there being enough food in homes as well as in the market places.[32] The remarkable growth was spurred by the supportive policies pursued by the Kenyatta government. The government subsidised the price of fertiliser making it affordable to most farmers. Although the agricultural sector may have not received full support from the government and a bias towards the large-scale sector was obvious, there was no major food deficiency in the decade to raise concern.

Despite the supportive government policy, farmers experienced some problems as a result of changes that were taking place on the international market. First, Kenya's agriculture began to falter under the oil-induced recession of 1973. The oil crisis led to an increase in transportation costs. This had a direct impact on the price of fertilisers which climbed from the previous Sh. 38 per kilogram to Sh. 195 in 1974.[33] Gatundu division was mainly affected, especially those farmers in the lowland areas (mainly the settlement schemes) who could not afford to buy fertiliser from alternative outlets. The farmers in the upper zone, which manifested more agricultural potential, could afford to purchase directly from local stockists.[34] Moreover, in the upper zones extra income derived from tea and dairy farming cushioned the farmers. They were therefore not hard-pressed for cash unlike those in the lowlands who depended solely on co-operative societies for their supply of agricultural inputs. Second, a delay in the short rains which fall between October to December caused a drop in the harvest in most parts of the district.

[32] KNA/KBU: Kiambu District Annual Report 1973, p.12.

[33] KNA/AMC/14/8: Gatundu Division Annual Report 1974.

[34] *Ibid*.

The government intervened and lowered fertiliser prices between 1975 and 1976. Following a reduction in the price, more farmers used fertilisers and subsequently higher yields were recorded. The period also witnessed an increase in farmer training through seminars, farm visits and demonstrations which were organised by the Department of Agriculture. Farmers were trained at the Salvation Army and Waruhiu Farmers' Training Centres.[35] Also, the period witnessed widespread adoption of soil conservation practices in the district, as exemplified by the case of Gatundu. Gatundu division scooped the top prize for soil conservation measures in the district. The emphasis on environmental conservation was reflective of the community's concern for ecologically sustainable development.

In time the CPCS experienced problems in its implementation and by the 1973 it was on the brink of collapse. The constraints emanated from several closely linked but significant factors. First, the poor recruitment of farmers created many problems in the issuance and repayment of loans. In many instances, the co-operative societies failed to recover loans from farmers who were overburdened servicing many loans. This stifled the financial stability of many societies. Second, the regulatory framework governing the operation of the CPCS was continually flouted by the staff in the UBSs. Although there was a USB manual that gave guidelines on loan processing, in many instances the staff overlooked the requirements. In most cases farmers were advanced larger loans than they could service. It was not uncommon to find a farmer with more than three parallel loans.

The progress in the recovery of the loans proved sluggish and hampered the expansion of the scheme as was earlier envisaged. There was frequent correspondence between the Union and the primary co-operative societies concerning outstanding loans but this was seldom acted upon. For example, in 1973 the Union officials wrote seeking payment of an outstanding loan of as much as Sh. 600,000. This was a large amount given the limited finances of the Union and the fact that the scheme was designed to be a revolving fund whereby farmers' capital was to supplement that which was obtained from the Co-operative Bank.

[35] *Ibid.*

Another reason that caused the collapse of the CPCS was institutional weaknesses evident in most primary societies. Therefore abuse of office by the management committees in different societies hampered effective enforcement of the regulations of the credit scheme. Accordingly, smallholder credit delivery was hampered by the weakness of institutions. The co-operative societies lacked the administrative capacity causing severe mismanagement of credit. On the other hand, after securing loans, ordinary members who had obtained loans from the societies sold their land or started their own pulperies, to avoid having any transactions with societies. This led to the amassing of debts that most societies failed to recover. Attempts by societies to recover money of defaulters from their guarantors proved almost futile and served to undermine the co-operative movement. Indeed, faced with such surveillance, guarantors quit the societies to evade repaying loans for others. The 'abuse' of credit facilities by all stakeholders, be they farmers, elected management committee members or the UBSs staff, amounted to the systematic looting of the societies.

Further efforts to assist farmers were embedded in the Special Rural Development Programme (SRDP) which was started in 1972 and lasted until 1976. Although Thika was not part of the pilot schemes, it is worth mentioning it as one of the efforts that was envisioned to benefit rural areas. The programme was short-lived and in its place came the Integrated Agricultural Development Programme (IADP), which was much narrower in terms of focus than the SRDP. It introduced short-and long-term credit facilities to smallholders in Kiambaa, Gatundu, Gatukuyu, and Kiganjo coffee co-operative societies.

In 1977 the IADP loans were issued to 658 farmers in the Gatundu division who were beneficiaries of a loan amounting to Sh. 1.5 million which was advanced by the Union to the societies in the division.[36] Unlike the CPCS, which made advances to coffee farmers, the IADP specifically financed maize, beans, potatoes, banana and dairy farming in the district. In 1978 Kiambu district qualified for a loan of Sh.7.5 million from the IADP. Of this 50 percent went into water improvements and farm

[36] KNA/AMC/14/5: Thika Division Monthly Reports Other Departments 1977.

equipment.[37] To a great extent coffee and dairy farmers were the greatest beneficiaries of the CPCS and IADP loans. Vertical mobility among the Kikuyu of Kiambu was pegged to involvement in one or more of these economic activities.[38] This accelerated the ongoing process of class differentiation among the residents of Thika. With the returns from agricultural production, farmers invested in non-farm sectors such as the transportation business. They were also able to install water tanks, pay school fees and meet other domestic obligations. This was a major advantage to such farmers who stood little chance of accessing credit from commercial financial institutions. Their acreage was too small to qualify as collateral and both the public and private agencies were very reluctant to advance agricultural credit to small farmers who were considered a bad risk.[39]

In spite of the advances that were made in agricultural production, certain sections of the population remained marginalised. As early as the 1962 there was an outcry that:

> [t]here is no doubt that the number of people in the district with money increased substantially and the district over-all is probably as healthy as any in the country. This, however, should not blind us to the appalling poverty which also exists side by side with the prosperity.[40]

Poverty was mirrored in malnutrition and food deficiency. The incidence of poverty and nutrition deficiencies increased during the 1970s when reports abound with calls for relief food.[41] Children from Ruiru and Gatundu divisions with severe levels of malnutrition were among those admitted at the Thika district hospital. In the lowland

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[37] RoK, *Kiambu District Development Plan 1979-83* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1979).

[38] David Throup, *Economic and Social Origins of Mau Mau* (Oxford: James Currey: 1987).

[39] H.W.O. Okoth-Ogendo, 'African Land Tenure' in Judith Heyer, J.K. Maitha and W.M. Senga (eds.) *Agricultural Development in Kenya: An Economic Assessment* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1976), p.175.

[40] KNA/DC/KBU/1/49 Kiambu District Annual Report 1962.

[41] KNA/AMC/14/8: Gatundu Divisions Annual Reports 1974-75; KNA/AMC/14/17: Thika Division Monthly Reports Other Departments 1974-76 and KNA/AMC/14/5: Thika Division Monthly Reports Other Departments 1977.

areas, particularly the *Haraka* settlement schemes, food shortages were experienced frequently. Although statistics on this are scanty, the annual reports are indicative of a regional variation in food scarcity and security. For instance, the Integrated Rural Survey (IRS) report of 1974/75 pointed out that malnutrition which was an indicator of poverty was on the rise in all parts of the country.[42]

Following the IRS report, more frantic efforts by the government to fight food poverty were witnessed. Guidelines were enshrined in the third National Development Plan of 1974-78. Drawing on the Plan, the Kiambu district outlined how the government would continually review the processes of production and marketing of agricultural produce with a view to making agriculture an economically viable enterprise.[43] In particular, the plan earmarked passion fruit and macadamia nut farming, as well as poultry sub-sectors which would be addressed. [44] In the same line the NDP of 1979 illuminated how the government would continue to accord support to the agriculture sector. Also, the government lowered the price of phosphate fertilisers, which was widely used by farmers. This was indicative of the enthusiasm on the part of the government to hasten modernisation of agriculture. In addition, the effectiveness of the agriculture extension service was bolstered through the continued training of agricultural staff at the government-sponsored, Egerton Agricultural Training College.[45] This was illustrative of the policies that the government annunciated in regard to food production.

The NDP envisaged novel objectives which might have increased returns in subsistence farming but its implementation coincided with the liberalisation of agriculture. Such pro-poor development plans have been recycled in successive

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[42] RoK, *Integrated Rural Survey 1974-5* (Nairobi: Central Bureau of Statistics) 1977, p.51.

[43] RoK, *Kiambu District Development Plan 1979-83* (Nairobi: Government Printer 1979), p. 18.

[44] *Ibid.*

[45] RoK, *Economic Survey 1979*, p.59.

development plans with little impact on poverty. The next section addresses the impact of liberalisation on food production in the district.

The Politics of Patrimonialism and Challenges of Liberalisation, 1981-2000

Agriculture, as the mainstay of Kenya's economy, is often exploited by the government of the day. In other words, the ruling elite introduce policies that tap resources for their clientele. From the 1980s the Moi administration demonstrated this in the policies that were introduced. However, the changes in the international political economy had a role to play in the agricultural policies of the period. In the remaining section of this chapter we focus on how the interplay of agricultural policies and international developments impacted on food production in Thika.

The ascendancy of Moi to power in 1978 marked the end of influence of the Kiambu Kikuyu establishment. President Moi came to power as the leader of a coalition opposed to the continuing dominance of a coterie of Kikuyu business leaders (see chapter one). As a former leader of the minority groups who were in Kenya African Democratic Union (KADU), notably the Kalenjin, Maasai in the Rift Valley Province, the Abaluhya in Western Kenya and those from the Coast Province, he advanced their interests while he shattered any of those that came in his way. In Lofchie's words, 'the Kenyatta government was economically rooted in the export sector, it tended to treat that sector with special care, as an irreplaceable national endowment to be nurtured for the well-being of future generations'.[46] The Moi administration stressed that increased wheat production would save foreign exchange as well as achieve self-sufficiency in food production.

To facilitate this, the Sessional Paper No. 4 of 1981 on *National Food Policy* was prepared which was reflective of the shift in paradigm. The Paper stated that 'throughout the past two decades certain sectors of the population remained malnourished as a result of income inequalities, fluctuations in supply and a lack of

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[46] Michael Lofchie, 'The Politics of Agricultural Policy' in Joel Barkan (ed.) *Beyond Capitalism vs Socialism in Kenya and Tanzania* (London: Lynne Rienner, 1994), p.158.

nutritional education among certain groups'.[47] The 'marginalised' communities were seen as having been isolated by the Kenyatta administration. To bring them to the mainstay of Kenya's economy, the government promised to look into their plight. Accordingly, modern methods of farming, that is, productivity-enhancing inputs would be provided at subsidised rates. In particular, the government was to take immediate steps to increase fertiliser use on food crops. This however was not a national programme that targeted farmers throughout the republic.

The reality was that the Moi government modified the principle of self-sufficiency in grain production to foster its own clientele of export-oriented farmers, residing in the Rift Valley. Not surprisingly, grain self-sufficiency, became the code language for economic levelling. The most direct beneficiaries of higher grain prices were the Kalenjin wheat growers of the Rift Valley. The pursuit of wheat farming had adverse effects on the rest of the economy given that wheat farming is not economically viable in Kenya. First, Kenya is not an ideal wheat growing area. Indeed, by the mid-1980s the producer price for wheat had to be raised to about 140 percent of the world price to stimulate production.[48] Second, the foreign exchange costs alone of locally produced wheat exceed its world market price. Subsequently, far from saving hard currency by growing wheat, Kenya was losing in precious exchange earnings to subsidise a small group of politically well-to-do farmers.

The government introduced the New Seasonal Crop Credit Scheme (NSCCS) in 1981 in place of the GMR system. The official purpose of the scheme was to increase credit to Kalenjin maize and wheat farmers. Also, through the scheme the government increased funding and extended its lending to the multitude of small-scale farmers in western Kenya. The NSCCS was disbursed through primary co-operative societies, the KFA and the Co-operative Bank. The loan was advanced to farmers who were growing maize on at least 10 acres of land. The loan was repayable from the maize proceeds. The timing of the loan was, however poor. It coincided with the collapse of

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[47] RoK, *Sessional Paper No.4 of 1981 on National Food Policy* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1981), p.17.

[48] Lofchie, 'The Politics of Agricultural Policy', p.160.

the co-operative movement in the country. Farmers who benefited from the loan immediately shifted their membership to other co-operative societies before servicing them.[49] The inefficiency in the disbursement and administration of loans hampered the recovery thereof. Political meddling, nepotism and inefficiency ruined co-operatives countrywide. President Moi issued a decree that barred civil servants and full-time politicians from vying for management positions in co-operative societies. This move received applause from small-scale farmers who had fallen prey to the machinations of the politically-influential persons who were in-charge of operations in primary co-operative societies (see chapter four). Arguably, the lethargy that characterised the management of co-operatives was representative of what was happening at the national institutions.

At the international level, Kenya's creditors took cognisance of the fact that too much government intervention had led to underperformance of agricultural parastatals. It is in this context that the implementation of the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) in the mid-1980s should be understood. The SAPs were an initiative by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The SAPs were part of the efforts to roll back the state and promote market forces. The main demands of the SAPs included: major currency devaluation and cuts in government subsidies to the public sector, liberalisation of the import sector, reduced price controls, privatisation of government controlled enterprises and democratisation of the state. Transparency and accountability in the management of public institutions became the international finance institutions' catch phrase.[50] The impact of the changes on the agricultural sector is briefly discussed.

Since 1983, the Kenya Shilling has been depreciated significantly both in nominal and in real terms. Between 1983 and 1989 there was a 79.6 percent nominal depreciation of the Kenya Shilling against the special drawing rights (SDR) and a 20.1 percent

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[49] KNA/AMC/14/14/4: Thika Division Annual Report 1981.

[50] See F. O'Brien and T. Ryan, 'Kenya: A Mixed Reformer' in D. Shantayan and T. Holmgren (eds.) *Aid and Reform in Africa* (Washington, 2001).

(26.5 percent) depreciation of the nominal (real) trade weighted effective rate.[51] The devaluation of the shilling proved deleterious to the subsistence production in many ways. First, the cost of foodstuffs, agricultural inputs and petroleum products skyrocketed. Second, there was a severe shortage of petroleum products, cooking fat and maize meal in the district.[52]

This hurt the ordinary people who had to stand in long queues for essential supplies only to be turned away with empty baskets. The Department of Trade issued a warning to traders hoarding essential commodities to desist, but the extent to which this was heeded was questionable. The situation was compounded by a famine in 1980. The effects of the famine were particularly felt by the people inhabiting the eastern parts of Thika. It was indeed the first experience of severe food shortage in Thika in the recent past. Informants remembered the 1970s with nostalgia as when they had supplies of food in their granaries. To a great majority of the people, the *nyayo* era was associated with famine and food shortages.

With the SAPs, there was a marked reduction in the government spending in agricultural extension services. By the mid-1980s the training of farmers through visits, residential training or demonstrations dwindled.[53] Lack of basic equipment such as visual aids to be used in the demonstration farms hampered the training of farmers in Gatundu, Komo, Kiganjo, Ndula, Ngoliba and Ndarugu.[54] Yet farmers who were going through economically hard times could not raise funds to finance their own training. Subsequently several training sessions had to be cancelled. The benefits that had been recorded in the growing of hybrid seeds and use of fertilisers were gradually being eroded. Farmers expressed apathy and were reluctant to engage in crop and farm management programmes.[55]

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[51] Benno Ndulu and Francis Mwega, 'Economic Adjustment Policies' in Barkan, *Beyond Capitalism,* p. 116.

[52] KNA/AMC/14/14/4: Thika Division Annual Report 1981.

[53] *Ibid.*

[54] KNA/MA/12/12 Kiambu District Annual Report 1985.

[55] RoK, Thika District Department of Agriculture various years.

Before Kenya had recovered from the effects of devaluation of the shilling and the famine, she received a loan from the World Bank in 1986. The loan was to finance reforms in the agricultural sector, specifically to facilitate production through providing incentives and to finance the importation of agricultural inputs and improvement of agricultural research facilities.[56] The *Sessional Paper No. 1 of 1986 on Economic Management for Renewed Growth* contained the strategies through which the reforms were to be implemented.

The key reforms included an abrupt withdrawal of extension services, increase in prices of agricultural inputs and liberalisation of consumer prices.[57] The liberalisation of consumer prices had a direct impact on the distribution of maize, the staple food of Kenyans. According to the terms of the loan, the government of Kenya agreed to divert interest of control of the maize trade. In practice, however, the vested interests of the government in the maize trade remained largely intact mainly because the regime enjoyed support from a clientele that was dependent on maize-farming found in the Rift Valley and Western Provinces. What followed was an intermittent control and decontrol of the maize trade regardless of the terms of the loan. Accordingly, the maize marketing board raised the price of maize to the consumers in a bid to reward the regime's allies.[58] In addition, the allocation of licenses for inter-regional maize-movements was used for political reasons whereby the Kalenjin maize farmers were licensed to sell maize in areas without adequate supplies including Central Kenya. Consequently, the people living in the maize 'deficit' areas had to obtain maize at highly inflated prices. More importantly, Moi had interest in agribusiness and hence

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[56] Francis Mwega and J.W.Kabubo, 'Kenya', in Adepoju Aderanti (ed.) *The Impact of Structural Adjustment on the Population of Africa* (United Nations Population Fund-UNPF-1993), p. 28.

[57] RoK, *Sessional Paper No. 1 of 1986 on Economic Management for Renewed Growth* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1986), p.89.

[58] John Toye, 'Interested Government Politics and Adjustment' in Peter Gibbon, Yusuf Bangura and Arve Ofstad (eds.) *Authoritarianism, Democracy and Adjustment: The Politics of Economic Reform in Africa* (Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1992), p.117.

the price "distortions" which were introduced by the World Bank formed an important part of the mechanisms for ensuring political support for his party.[59] Indeed, the government feared that the Kikuyu would take up the business and dislodge the Kalenjin traders. This made it difficult for the private sector to invest in maize marketing activities.

It was only in 1997 that the government restored fixed prices for maize and introduced a tariff on maize imports following pressure from the World Bank. The government justified this return to the pre-reform status quo by alluding to food security and welfare concerns for small farmers. The reality, however, was that the policy overwhelmingly favoured big farmers who were predominantly Kalenjin. The new policy offered an average subsidy of US$ 19,200 to an average large farm of 200 acres.[60] Such vast acreages were the preserve of the Kalenjin. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, on average the smallholders in Thika owned less than two acres of land.

From the foregoing it is apparent, notwithstanding the liberalisation wave of the 1990s, the Kalenjin political elite was reluctant to restructure the economy in a way that would reduce their access to state resources, a privilege previously enjoyed by the Kikuyu elite. The selective introduction of macro-economic reforms, as evidenced by the reversals in the liberalisation of the maize market were part of the larger scheme and machinations aimed at destroying the Kikuyu hegemony and to dismantle the economic foundations of the Kenyatta state. Effectively this was carried out by denying the Kikuyu ascendant capitalist class any state patronage thus politically squeezing them out of business (see chapter four).

The dairy sector suffered a similar fate in the liberalisation period. As was mentioned in the first section of this chapter, the Chania, Gatanga and Kiganjo, among other dairies, were a major source of income for farmers in Thika. However, from 1981

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[59] *Ibid.*

[60] T.S. Jayne, *et al.* 'Do Farmers really Benefit from High Food Prices? (Policy Brief, Tegemeo Institute for Agricultural Development Policy No.1 September 2000).

inefficiency in the collection of milk, processing, delay in payment and lack of essential services became the norm in many of the co-operative societies.[61] The problems were traced to inefficiency in the KCC which at that time was patronised by the Kalenjin elite. The KCC though constituted as a co-operative, was run as a government parastatal during the Moi era. The co-operative was used as a channel through which politics of patrimonialsim were played out.

During the 1981 famine, politicians from the western Kenya, who were close allies of the Moi administration, were mandated to buy maize from the National Cereals and Produce Board at throw away prices. The co-operative societies in Western Kenya seized the opportunity to siphon funds from the government through the board and divert them to benefit their own constituents. Again, politicians and officials from the Ministry of Co-operative Development seized this opportunity to forge political bonds with the new national government. A loan's officer from the Co-operative Bank described the whole loaning process thus:

> People in the region [Western] feel that the rest of Kenya had got their share and that this had been going on forever. So these funds were their right. So they took a ton [sic] of money. They had watched Central Province gobble up money…you should be pleased with your government now we have got your share.[62]

To recover the losses the government turned to the dairy farmers in Central Province to transfer their bank accounts from commercial banks to the government-run Co-operative Bank. In February 1980 the management of the co-operative societies in Thika district embarked on serious campaigns to lure members into opening accounts with the Co-operative Bank.[63] Left with no other option or avenue to access credit, many farmers obliged and opened bank accounts accordingly.

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[61] KNA/Thika/Gatundu Divisions Annual Report 1981, p.16.

[62] Quoted in Robert Bates, *Beyond the Miracle of the Market: The Political Economy of Agrarian Development in Kenya* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp.126, 127.

[63] KNA/MR/2/42: Gatukuyu Coffee Growers Co-operative Society 1981-83.

Further, the Commissioner of Co-operative Development (CCD) used the excessive powers bestowed on him to ensure that money from the co-operative societies in central Kenya went to underwrite the losses incurred on behalf of the government. This marked the beginning of the downfall of the dairy co-operatives in the region. In subsequent years, dairy farmers experienced unending problems from their respective societies. Inefficiency in milk collection, processing, delay and non payment of milk dues and lack of essential services became commonplace.[64] This stifled and finally killed the once prosperous dairy industry not only in Central province but Kenya in general.

At the time the KCC was patronised by the Kalenjin elite. Corruption fuelled by inept government officials was so rampant that at one point former President Moi was explicit that the 'KCC was headed by people who were only interested in eating'.[65] Many of its directors and former top Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and business associates used the KCC as an important means to quickly accumulate personal wealth leading to its liquidation in 1998 due to a debt of Sh. 900 million. [66]

Nearly Sh.380 million worth of milk from Central Province went to waste in 2001. In addition, the continued importation of powdered milk and milk cream spelt more problems for the troubled dairy sector. Political patronage was employed alongside other measures put in place by the Moi regime to demobilise the Kikuyu. As is common practice with politics of patrimonialism, ethnic cleavages were emphasised at the expense of the 'others'. Whereas, previously the Kikuyu reaped the benefits of patronage, it was now time for the Kalenjin and their allies to have unlimited access to state resources. Towards the end of the Moi era, the previous vibrancy manifested by the people in Kiambu activities had waned.[67] The cattle dips that were built of

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[64] KNA/Thika/Gatundu Divisions Annual Report 1981, p.16.

[65] *East African Standard*, 8 July 2002.

[66] *Ibid.*

[67] Barkan, 'Decentralization and Democratization in Sub-Saharan', p.28.

harambee spirit in the 1960s through the 1970s gradually were closed down, AI services became a thing of the past and dairy farming became unprofitable. This culminated in the closing down of many of the dairies in the region.

The most significant effect of liberalisation has not necessarily been an increase in accessibility of productivity-enhancing inputs, but a proliferation of racketeering in their production and distribution. Since the 1990s there have been persistent complaints from farmers regarding unscrupulous traders who sell them different types of wrong or uncertified maize, beans and potato seeds.[68] In most cases these traders mixed hybrid seeds meant for different agro-ecological zones and sold them to unsuspecting farmers. Unsurprisingly, government and co-operative officials were incriminated in the racketeering.[69] In some instances, government officials were accused of diverting inputs intended for public use into private property and sold to unsuspecting farmers. The crisis was aggravated by the absence of surveillance from extension officers. In addition the Kenya Seed Company, a state corporation charged with the production and sale of seeds, failed to produce and distribute sufficient quantities of seedlings in the 1990s.[70] Left with few options most farmers shelled maize and used landraces to plant which substantially reduced their farm yields.

Similarly, fertiliser was out of reach to many smallholders although given the inelasticity of land in Thika, intensification in farming remains the best way to enhance food security. However, for this to be realised there is need to have an efficient way through which fertiliser is promptly delivered to farmers. The liberalisation of the fertiliser trade in 1993 was followed by the entry of private distributors and retailers. Over time there has been an escalation in fertiliser prices caused by persistent inflation, changes in foreign exchange control, competitiveness in the trade and a decrease in donor funding. An examination of fertiliser prices and usage bears.

[68] KNA/AMC/14/15: Thika Division Monthly Reports from Other Departments 1991-1993.

[69] *Ibid.*

[70] *Ibid.*

In 2000, a 50-kg bag of di-ammonium phosphate (DAP) and calcium ammonium nitrate (CAN) cost Sh. 1,500.[71] Stockists were forced to repackage 50-kg bags into one kilogram measure in order to realise high turnovers and also make fertiliser affordable to the poor farmers. Even with the availability of fertilisers in small packages, its intermittent shortages rendered its usage less profitable. Coupled with the poor road network found in most parts of the district, agricultural production has dwindled over the years. Stockists who operated in relatively inaccessible areas such as Gatuanyaga and Gatanga, reported low trading margins resulting from the high transport costs that they had to incur. The heavy costs were transferred to farmers who had to spend a lot of more time seeking outlets where they could obtain fertiliser at lower prices and lateness in planting. Without government subsidy most farmers still cannot afford to use the required amounts of fertilisers on their farms. Yet, an analysis of the soil in Thika showed that the soils were depleted of essential nutrients making the use of mineral fertilisers inevitable. Most of the peasant farmers who could not afford fertilisers used farmyard manure to replenish soil nutrients yet not all farmers had livestock.

Subsequently, Thika has continued to record low levels of subsistence production, notably, that of maize. Although maize occupied 31 percent of the cropped area in the district its annual production in the last decade fell below the target.[72] For instance, in 1999, 365,760 bags were produced instead of the targeted 960,000 bags.[73] Sometimes the loss in maize production could go as high as 40 percent, particularly when the rains fail. In such circumstances, the district has to rely on supplies from the Rift Valley at inflated prices. This increases the food insecurity in the district. A delay in the rains can ruin a season's crop as was evidenced by failure of the short rains in 1999 resulting in a shortage of beans in the district.[74] The district relies on supplies from Murang'a and Machakos. For the poor households the costs are high and little wonder that most households cannot afford their daily caloric intake.

[71] RoK, Thika District Department of Agriculture Annual Report 2000.

[72] RoK, *Thika District Development Plan1997*, p.20.

[73] RoK, Thika District Department of Agriculture Annual Report 1999.

[74] *Ibid.*

The profitability of farming was further undermined by a dilapidated transport system. In the high potential agricultural areas of Gatanga, Gatundu and Kamwangi divisions, the road network is poor, particularly during the rainy season.[75] Owing to many years of disrepair and neglect, most of the rich agricultural areas are poorly connected to the rest of the district and other market outlets. During the rainy season the roads become impassable yet the Moi government was not keen to repair them. Available evidence shows that the only repair done on some of the roads involved patching up potholed sections.[76] Even then, due to poor workmanship by shoddy contractors the repaired roads soon reverted to a dilapidated state. This reality compares sharply with that of the 1970s when Kiambu had a relatively developed infrastructure owing to Kenyatta's influence (see chapter one). Lack of proper infrastructure denies farmers an opportunity to exploit the ever expanding market in the towns of Thika, Ruiru, Juja, Gatanga and Nairobi. The distance between farmers in most parts of the district and this lucrative market is between 20 and 40 kilometres. According to one of the middlemen (brokers) in the Kamwangi division, many of the farmers in the area either cannot transport the produce or are ignorant of the existing demand for their farm produce.[77] It is only a few better-off traders as well as farmers who have some capital who take advantage of the situation and exploit it to the maximum. This category does not really fit into the poor in the district whose plight this study is concerned with.

During the long rainy season between March and May, farms incur heavy losses as the perishable produce rots on the farms.[78] The only way by which farmers could dispose of their produce was selling to intermediaries who transported the farm produce to the neighbouring market outlets. The middlemen buy the produce at extremely low prices, charging that they hire tractors or trucks to transport farm produce to the markets in the neighbouring towns. The crops which are mainly

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[75] RoK, Thika District Department of Agriculture Annual Report 1997.

[76] KNA/MA/12/199: Kiambu District Annual Report General 1973-1994.

[77] Personal Communication, Wainaina Ngugi, Kamwangi, 5 June 2002.

[78] Ministry of Finance and Planning (MoF&P), *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) Thika District* (Nairobi, 2001), p.8.

affected by lack of a stable marketing structure include pineapples, avocadoes, mangoes and other perishable farm produce, for which Thika is renowned. Although these fruits are grown for subsistence, often farmers have a surplus that they sell in the *ndunyu* (Kikuyu for markets) or by the roadside.[79]

The case of pineapples illustrates the frustrations of small scale farmers, particularly in the Gakoe region of Kamwangi division. Thika is famous for large-scale pineapple growing which is carried out by Del Monte Kenya. There are also many small-scale pineapple farmers in the Kamwangi division. The performance of the latter sector has been suppressed by a government policy that has given Del Monte leverage in growing pineapples since the 1960s. On the basis of production of low quality pineapples, the government had acquiesced to Cirio Del Monte's demands that the smallholder scheme should be phased out. This was a clear case of according preferential treatment to a multinational company while stifling local potential.

These among other closely related factors killed small-scale pineapple farming in Thika to the extent that by the 1990s small-scale pineapple farmers in Kamwangi division did not have an organised marketing structure through which they could sell their produce.[80] The promising enterprise died a natural death, locking out the potential that probably would improved the livelihoods of the smallholder pineapple farmers in the region. By 2000, farmers were dependent on intermediaries who bought pineapples cheaply only to make abnormal profits in the neighbouring towns. Similarly, farmers incur heavy losses from other perishable farm produce whose volatile prices make them quite unpredictable. For instance, in a single year the prices of green maize, peas and tomatoes can triple. Table 3.1 shows the lowest and highest prices of some of the agricultural produce in 1998 and 2000.

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[79] Personal Communication, Wainaina Ngugi, Kamwangi, 5 June 2002.

[80] KNA/AMC/14/15: Thika Division Monthly Reports Other Departments 1991-1993.

Table: 3.1 Price Fluctuations in Some Agricultural Produce in 1998 and 2000[81]

		1998		2000	
Commodity	**Unit**	Lowest and Highest Prices in Sh.[82]			
	.	LP	HP	LP	HP
Tomatoes	63 kg	750	1600	300	3000
Fresh peas	90 kg	800	3100	900	2800
Kales	Extra bag	200	1000	220	500
Cabbages	Extra bag	300	2000	900	2000
Green Maize	Extra bag 100 kg			580	2500
Carrots	80 kg	350	3000	450	1500 (50kg)
Spring onions	Extra bag	800	2000	1200	3200
Dry onions	14 kg net	320	560	350	490
Avocadoes	50 kg	230	900	250	950 (40 kg)
Pineapples	Dozen	120	340	200	360
Lemons	extra bag			700	2000
Oranges				200	2200
Cooking bananas				180	400
Ripe bananas	(bunch)			200	420
Eggs	1 tray			120	150
Mangoes Extra Bag				250	450

Not only are farmers unable to take advantage of their proximity to the available market but also lacked storage facilities for their produce.[83] Most of the women farmers had formed groups to market their produce but the success of such groups hinged on other factors some of which are addressed in chapter eight.

Most of the informants were of the opinion that with more organised marketing structures, farmers probably would earn some income out of their surplus produce.

[81] RoK, Thika District Agriculture Office Annual Reports 1998 and 2000.

[82] Although for much of the period the prices are not provided which could be lower or higher. There might therefore be some but slight disparity.

[83] MoF&P, *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper,* p.8.

Accordingly the government should establish cottage industries in the various divisions which would process their farm produce and sell them during the low season.[84] What was worrisome was that the fruit and packaging plants in the town of Thika were on the verge of closing, citing lack of consistent supply of fruits.[85] This reflects lack of proper coordination in the whole agricultural sector and a failure to address the specific needs of the various regions.

Similarly, lack of organised marketing structures impacted on the delivery of milk to the dairy processing plants Kiganjo, Ngenda and Chania. This problem emanated from poor road network, particularly during the rainy season. Also, prior to 1992 restrictions were imposed by the Kenya Dairy Board prohibiting farmers from selling raw milk to any other outlet except the KCC.[86] The liberalisation of the dairy sector was followed by proliferation of new milk marketers who offered better prices. For instance, the Brookside Dairies were opened in Thika in the 1990s by the Kenyatta family. Most farmers in the district patronised it rather than the KCC.

In addition, there was a heavy presence of hawkers who mainly used bicycles and *matatus* (public means of transport) to deliver milk to the neighbouring towns. With the demise of the KCC, farmers prefer to sell milk through this informal outlet, despite its numerous shortcomings. First, hawkers pay farmers either daily or fortnightly. Consequently, farmers cannot accumulate money to buy animal feeds. For example, a 90-kg bag of maize germ costs Sh. 1,000, which is a large sum for farmers who receive payments of between Sh.50 and 100 on a daily basis. In most cases farmers spend the earnings from milk on other domestic needs, sparing little or none at all for fodder. Second, taking into account that hawkers do not buy milk in bulk, the price they offer is normally low. Third, selling milk to hawkers can be risky and quite unpredictable. Often the less scrupulous milk hawkers disappear before paying the farmers.

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[84] Personal Communication, Hannah Kabura, Gatundu, 19 March 2002.

[85] RoK, Thika District Department of Agriculture Annual Report 2003.

[86] KNA, Thika/Gatundu Divisions Annual Report 1981, p.16.

The constraints that affect dairy farmers have led to a decline in their numbers in the district. The once vibrant dairy sector has lapsed to a domain for farmers who have an extra-source of income to cushion them from the effects of an unstable dairy sector. Between 1990 and 1995, the number of dairy farmers plummeted in Thika district whilst it rose in the neighbouring Kiambu and Murang'a districts.[87] The Gatanga and Kariara dairies became insolvent after dissatisfied members stopped delivering milk to the societies.[88]

Besides the structural and institutional problems, vagaries of the weather also affected the level of agricultural productivity in the district. As we noted at the beginning of this chapter, Thika relies on rain-fed agriculture and hence a failure in the rains increased the likelihood of there being a famine. Some parts of Thika have experienced droughts every three years or so. In 1975, 1981, 1984, 1993 and 1997, the southern parts of Gatundu, and the Haraka schemes experienced droughts and famine.[89]

The continued cultivation along the river banks compounded the environmental hazards being experienced by farmers in the district. In the last two decades the densely populated divisions of Gatundu and Kamwangi have experienced serious environmental degradation. Along the Athi, Chania, Ndarugu, Thiririka and Theta rivers the cultivation affected the flow of the water and could potentially cause the rivers to dry up. In spite of campaigns on environmental conservation measures by the Department of Agriculture the problem remains pervasive.[90]

The problem was accelerated by shrinking cultivable land. Rather than plant strips along river banks, the land poor and the landless utilise any empty space to cultivate

[87] M. Owango, B. Lukuyu, S.J. Staal, D. Njubi and W.Thorpe, 'Dairy Co-operatives and Policy Reform in Kenya: Effects of Livestock Service and Milk Market Liberalisation', *Food Policy*, 23, 2 (1998), pp.173-178.

[88] RoK, Thika District Labour Office Annual Report 1996.

[89] KNA/AMC/4/3: Thika District Development Committee 1984.

[90] KNA/AMC/4/15: Thika Division Monthly Reports from Other Departments 1991-1993.

subsistence crops or fodder. The immediate needs of the poor made them out of ignorance overlook the effects of their actions on the natural habitat. It is argued that in Thika poverty is both a cause and consequence of land degradation. Cultivation of river banks illustrates how one form of deprivation can adversely affect other aspects with long-term effects.

Wild life has also proved to be a menace to the residents of Thika. The human and wild life conflict experienced in the district also undermined the realisation of food security in the district. This was particularly widely felt in the eastern parts of Thika and Gatundu divisions.[91] Buffaloes, elephants, elands and monkeys from the Kilimambogo area and other parks in the district roamed around the farms and destroyed food crops. On average, the Department of Agriculture estimated that the damage done by wild life reduced harvest by as much as 20 percent.[92] The conflicted continued in the 1990s when farmers continuously requested the game rangers to step up their efforts to control the wild life menace.[93] But there was little reprieve. More importantly, the farmers were seldom compensated for the losses by the Ministry of Agriculture. Red tape and lack of ways to authenticate losses hampered the process of lodging complaints and seeking compensation. The main reason given by the Department of Agriculture for failure to compensate farmers was that the treasury did not provide sufficient adequate funds for it.[94] But so far there is no permanent solution to protect farmers and their produce.

Food poverty in the district was also a consequence of discriminative traditional feeding habits and cultural diversity evident in the district. A few illustrations are provided. First, there prevailed an attitude of people towards tubers, particularly cassava and sweet potatoes. The two tubers thrived in the southeastern parts of Thika district which lie in the arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs). Notwithstanding, the

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[91] *Ibid.*

[92] KNA/14/14/4: Thika Division Annual Report Other Departments 1981.

[93] KNA/AMC/14/9: Thika Division Monthly Reports Other Departments 1991-1993.

[94] RoK, Thika District Department of Agriculture Annual Report 1999.

frequent food shortages that the people in the area faced, they were indifferent to growing these crops. First, cassava is associated with poverty and famine. During the cassava famine or *ng'aragu ya mianga* of 1941, Kenya experienced severe food shortages and cassava was the only available food. Henceforth, most people in Central Kenya believe that cassava is consumed only during famines. By 1996 only about 222 hectares of land was under cassava cultivation.[95] In regard to food security, cassava growing would arrest food shortage in this marginal area. It could also be sold to earn extra income for the impoverished farmers, which is not happening at the moment. This was despite the mounting of campaigns by the Department of Agriculture enjoining the people in Thika to embrace growing drought-resistant crops in a bid to stem perennial food shortages.

Second, sorghum which is a major source of iron, calcium and potassium was not grown in most parts of the district. Sorghum was dismissed as a crop that can only be grown in the marginal areas. The nutritional value of the crop was therefore not taken into consideration by farmers in high and medium agricultural zones located in Gatundu, Kamwangi and Gatanga divisions. For a long time, farmers did not make an effort to experiment with this crop. It is only recently that a few 'enlightened' farmers have started to grow the crop but it occupies a minimal acreage. Third, other crops such as pigeon peas are readily grown because they have a cultural value to Akamba who mainly live on the eastern part of Thika. Pigeon peas are an important drought resistant crop that is suitable for the low rainfall areas. The crop is usually intercropped with cereals and is also planted on the boundaries of fields thereby serving as hedge. Production rose from 180 bags in 1999 to over 200 bags in 2000.[96]

Although all these examples are premised on the theory of food sovereignty, an attainment of food self-sufficiency was undermined. Food sovereignty is the right of peasant farmers to produce food and the right of consumers to be able to decide what they consume, and how and by whom it is produced. The idea of food sovereignty

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[95] RoK, *Thika District Development Plan 1997*, p.23.

[96] RoK, Thika District Department of Agriculture Annual Report 2000.

might be suited to counter neo-liberal food policies as it safeguards against the dumping of genetically modified organisms (GMOs). However, at the local level of production, its practicability is questionable, particularly if it undermines the local peoples' capacity to grow a variety of food that can forestall food insecurity.

Finally, an observation that was made throughout the period of the study was that laziness and idleness were a key component of creating food poverty in the area. It was not uncommon to find youthful men roaming around the shopping centres all day long. Such youths could expend their energies on farms growing vegetables. Instead, they claim that farming is not for youths who had been to school. Such reasoning and lack of incentives all served to compound the food crises in the area. For the hard working households, streams in the area and swamps were utilised in the irrigation of fields, thus making horticultural farming not only a lucrative enterprise but was also an escape route from starvation.

High food poverty levels have become a feature of Thika. In 2002 food poverty in the district was estimated at 48.4 percent.[97] The food intake of most of the rural dwellers was made up of carbohydrates and starch. Under five-year olds were mainly affected by the imbalanced diet. This caused the high mortality registered in Thika which stood at 149 per 1000 which was more than double the national rate which stood at 70 per 1000.[98] In addition, scurvy, stunting, wasting and rashes were manifest among young and school-going children.[99]

During my visits to the hospital I observed many children suffering from kwashiorkor, marasmus and other nutritional deficiencies. The children were identified at the outpatient department by the nurses. They were then admitted to the hospital if their condition was considered serious. They were fed on foods rich in vitamins and proteins. The nurses however observed that as soon as the children were released to the mothers they reverted to the same status. A visit to many of these

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[97] MoF&P, *Thika District Development Plan 2002-2008*, p.9.

[98] RoK, *Kenya Demographic and Health Survey 2003*, p.114, and RoK, *Thika District Development Plan,* p.54.

[99] Personal Communication, Jane Ngigi, Ruiru, 3 March 2002.

home showed that there was no food in the cupboards. Most of the mothers whose malnourished children were being rehabilitated were married to poor husbands who were mainly self-employed in low income jobs. Others alleged that most men had taken to drinking illegal brews and provided little for their families. Accordingly, a nutritional diet was out of reach for most of the growing babies.

Although political reasons seem to be the most conspicuous causes of the decline in agriculture in the district, we should not lose sight of the cultural and environmental factors. A concluding remark would be that few people would doubt that the economic disaster was a consequence of systematic and endemic corruption on the part of the country's rulers. Moi's succession to the presidency set the scene for the capture of the state by Kalenjin and minority elites who were relatively impoverished. Using the words of Ajulu the difference between the Kenyatta and Moi regimes was the intensity of kleptocracy, as a matter of degree and not content.[100] The same opinion is shared by Throup who contends that the decline in Kenya's polity is a consequence of the neo-patrimonial political structure created by Kenyatta, which was intensified during the Moi era.[101]

Despite the optimistic pro-market focus, reforms have not elicited the expected results. Although substantial reforms started in 1993, production of the main food crops stagnated or declined in the 1990s. This has been attributed to the failure of organisations within and outside government. The poor performance of the agricultural sector under liberalised market policies created an institutional void. The hasty way in which the reforms were implemented did not give room for the preparation of farmers to adjust. There was no proper planning for the private sector to take over the loaning and marketing services. This followed the assumption that the exit of the government would be followed by its immediate replacement by the private sector.

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[100] Rok Ajulu, 'Kenya's Democracy Experiment: The 1997 Elections' in *Review of African Political Economy*, 76, 25 (1998), p.279.

[101] David Throup, 'Elections and Political Legitimacy in Kenya' *Africa*, 63, (1993), p.371.

In this chapter we have argued that Thika district has a substantial acreage of fertile land but there is little to show for it given the high levels of malnutrition and food insecurity frequently reported in the district. Lack of food security is a key indicator of poverty. Although in the 1970s, malnutrition was mainly confined to the marginal areas of Thika, cases of malnutrition were being reported even in prime areas such as Gatundu. In the 1970s the reasons advanced for malnutrition were anchored in the poor methods of farming, negligence by mothers and the practice of intercropping which undermined the yields.

In the 1980s through 1990s the causes of malnutrition can be traced to both the old causes but new element are included, such as lack of inputs, lack of subsidies, use of uncertified seeds, proliferation of unscrupulous traders selling fake fertilisers or seedlings and the fact that the extension services are limited and largely privatised. In addition, farmers sell their green maize in the towns. The population generally consume a lot of starch and carbohydrates leading to high levels of wasting and stunting.

Under the auspices of the politics of patrimonialism, political meddling ruined the delivery of agricultural-enhancing inputs in the country. The Moi administration withdrew agricultural subsidies from the farmers in Central Kenya but delivered the same to those in the Rift Valley and Western Provinces. The decline in agricultural support for farmers in Thika coincided with the introduction of market reform policies which aggravated the crisis in food production. The removal of agricultural subsidies and lack of control over consumer prices had adverse effects on poor households. Indeed, delivery of inputs was not only delayed, but instances of supply of fake ones, was commonplace. Consumers were preyed on by unscrupulous traders who would not jeopardise their profits in their interest. Efforts towards the attainment of food sovereignty are countered by cultural values and attitudes that prohibit certain communities from eating certain foods. This denies such communities foods of high nutritional value which in most cases are cheap and readily available. Beyond politics of agrarian development vagaries of the weather played a crucial role in the impoverishment of the poor. The pursuit of politically-motivated agricultural policies has seen an otherwise potential food basket transformed into a region of food deficit.

CHAPTER FOUR

A 'FRUITLESS TREE': THE RISE AND FALL OF THE COFFEE INDUSTRY IN THIKA DISTRICT, 1953-2000

Kenya's arabica coffee is considered a specialty in the world market and it fetches a premium price. Coffee is grown on volcanic soils found in the highlands of Kenya at an altitude of between 1,500 and 2,100 metres, areas with high and well-distributed rainfall. The main coffee growing areas stretch south from the slopes of Mt. Kenya to Nairobi, Bungoma, Meru and some parts of the Rift Valley. Coffee is grown by both smallholder coffee farmers who belong to co-operatives societies and large coffee estates with more than 25 hectares.[1] There are between 500,000 and 700,000 members of co-operative societies, about 2,000 coffee farmers in the small and medium estate category and about 200 planters with more than 200 hectares of coffee.[2]

Since the colonial period, coffee has been a leading export crop and it occupied a large share of the productive land (see chapters one and two). In the first few decades of independence coffee was a leading source of foreign exchange. However, since the late 1980s, Kenya's coffee industry has been going through a slump, occasioned by neo-liberal policies and a shift in the national agricultural policies. The level of coffee production has declined significantly from a peak of 129,000 tons in 1987 to 95,000 and 50,000 tons in 2000 and 2001 respectively.[3] By 2000, coffee's contribution to local economy trailed behind that of horticulture, tea and tourism. The last mentioned has been the chief foreign exchange earner since 1987.[4]

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[1] Republic of Kenya (RoK), *Sessional Paper No.2 of 2001 on Liberalisation and Restructuring of the Coffee Industry* (February, 2001), p.4.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] RoK, *National Development Plan 2002-2008* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 2001), p.27.

[4] Francis Mwega and J.W. Kabubo, 'Kenya', in Aderanti Adepoju (ed.) *The Impact of Structural Adjustment on the Population of Africa* (United Nations Population Fund-UNPF-1993), p. 25.

The poor performance of industry has a direct bearing on the residents of Thika, who are dependent on coffee for income. Although tea is also grown in the district, the acreage is small and the number of households that depend on tea are fewer.[5] However, tea has become a lucrative enterprise as returns from coffee have dwindled. The purpose of this chapter is to put into perspective the performance of the coffee sector in the last four decades. First, it traces the origins of coffee growing and the growth of coffee co-operative societies in Thika. Second, it traces the prosperity that was associated with coffee farming. Third, an evaluation of agriculture policy is attempted under the lens of ethnic politics. Finally, we assess the effect of the collapse of the industry and the concomitant poverty in the district

The Origins and Expansion of Coffee-Farming by Africans, 1953–1962

Since colonial days, Thika has always been associated with coffee farming. Coffee-growing was introduced by missionaries in the 20th century, after which it was taken up by pioneers in the district. Indeed, the area between Nairobi and Kiambu to the west and east of Thika is known for its well-drained soils which made it ideal for coffee-farming. In her book *The Flame Trees of Thika,* Elspeth Huxley the British memoirist described the land in Thika as an ideal coffee belt with rich soils, right altitude and rainfall which experts had confirmed.[6] Her family was among the first coffee pioneers in Makuyu division, one of the main coffee growing areas alongside Mitubiri, Ruiru and Ol Donyo Sabuk divisions of Thika district. The main cultivars grown were the SL 28 and 34.

Before 1933, Africans were not allowed to grow coffee for various but related reasons. First, the white farmers feared that African land units would be infested with pests and diseases that would easily spread to European plantations. Secondly, it was anticipated that if the Africans were allowed to grow cash crops there was a likelihood that the white farmers would face labour shortages. Thirdly, with African and settler producers there would be stiff competition or even a slump coffee prices, to the

[5] James Nyoro and T.S. Jayne, 'Trends in Regional Agricultural Productivity in Kenya' (Nairobi: Tegemeo, 2001), p.7.

[6] Elspeth Huxley, *The Flame Trees of Thika: Memories of an African Childhood* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1959), p.8.

disadvantage of the settlers. To foreclose these eventualities, Africans were not allowed to venture into cash crop production, and they did not receive it kindly. It was worse for the Kikuyu who lived in the heartland of the coffee growing area. In an attempt to infiltrate coffee farming, Chief Koinange wa Mbiyu, one of the senior chiefs in colonial Kenya, obtained coffee plantings from a missionary, one Canon Leakey, which he planted on his Kiambaa Farm. He was soon forced to uproot the coffee trees because it was feared that other Kikuyu would follow suit.[7] Coffee production and marketing was closely regulated.

In accordance with Kenya's Coffee Act Cap 333, all coffee must be delivered to the Coffee Board of Kenya (CBK). The CBK was established in 1933 and enjoyed a monopoly in the marketing coffee until 2001 when the Coffee Act was reviewed. Until then, the CBK was the regulatory agency in the coffee industry. Its functions included: production services, monitoring of processing, marketing, production research and extension and promotion of export. The CBK controlled a central marketing auction normally held weekly at the Nairobi Coffee Exchange (NCE). It appointed coffee brokers and regulated their activities and those of buyers. After coffee is sold, the CBK pays remittances directly to the accounts of coffee planters' or through coffee factory accounts for co-operative societies, after making deductions to cover costs for functions undertaken by various institutions and other charges.

Under the auspices of the Swynnerton Plan of 1954, the government reviewed restrictive policies on export production and expanded coffee farming to the African Land Units.[8] As soon as landowners had their land consolidated they hastily embarked on coffee planting. During field research, I learnt that some farmers planted coffee even before their land had been registered.[9] In the quest for coffee farming, some households planted coffee on all their land and left only a small acreage for subsistence crops. The zeal was premised on the belief that returns from coffee would

[7] Jeff Koinange, *Koinange-wa-Mbiyu: Mau Mau's Misunderstood Leader* (Lewes, Sussex: Book Guild, 2000), p.26.

[8] R.J.M.Swynnerton, *A Plan to Intensify African Agriculture in Kenya* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1954), p.61.

[9] Personal Communication, Njonjo wa Kairu, Kamwangi, 5 May 2002.

be high enough to cover the cost of buying food.[10] In respect of the new enterprise, the 'Kikuyu saw through rose-tinted spectacles'.[11]

The farmers were convinced that the good years far outnumbered the bad and that the profits of those years would provide a hedge against losses in other years. They were also convinced that they would be able to invest their profits more wisely than Europeans who 'ate what they earned and did not buy land.'[12] The returns from coffee sales were about ten times those from other crops, thus many farmers opted to plant coffee extensively.[13] For instance, when a husband and wife were engaged in wage labour they relied on *ngwatio* or collective cultivation for the preparation of land in readiness for planting coffee. In other words, everyone was determined to benefit even if one planted only a few coffee bushes. As will become apparent in this chapter such optimism turned out to be unfounded.

Institutional support from the Department of Agriculture was channelled through cash crop officers, co-operative development officers, sprayers and instructors, all of whom were at the service of the African farmers.[14] Initially, all farmers irrespective of the size of land they owned were only allowed to grow 100 coffee bushes per acre until in 1960 when the number of bushes was raised to 280.[15] From the outset, the Department of Agriculture was emphatic that in coffee 'profits were pegged to quality.'[16] Hence quality was monitored from the farms right up to the various stages in which coffee berries were processed.[17] At the production level each sub-location

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[10] Greet Kershaw, *Mau Mau from Below* (London: James Currey, 1997), p.167.

[11] *Ibid.*

[12] Kershaw, *Mau Mau from Below*, p.167.

[13] *Ibid.*

[14] KNA/MR/2/84: Kiambu Coffee Growers Co-operative Union 1954-57.

[15] KNA/BV/23/67: Kiambu District Annual Report 1960.

[16] *Ibid.*

[17] Coffee processing is carried out at two levels. At the factory, the cherry or coffee which has been sorted is pulped (removal of outer cover), fermented (separation of the mucilage from the bean). After fermentation the beans are called parchment and are

was served by a Field Committee, comprising two coffee farmers charged with the responsibility of monitoring and reporting on members who did not adhere to good coffee husbandry. Subsequently, such farmers were not allowed to deliver their coffee to the factories until they improved their fields accordingly. The committee was paid an allowance by the farmers. At the district level, a Coffee Working Group coordinated supervision of production and ensured that coffee was only grown in the scheduled areas.

The enthusiasm for coffee farming was mirrored in the rise in demand for seedlings which outstripped the supply. Seedlings had to be imported from as far as Embu and Nakuru districts.[18] Colonial Chiefs Herman Muraya and Nehemiah Gitonga of Gatukuyu, Chief Josiah and Magugu Komothai, Simon Kimani, Gacicio Mimi of Gititu, Charles Karuga of Kiambaa and Kibathi and Solomon Ngomo of Gatundu and their sons formed the first group of coffee farmers in Kiambu. They were also pivotal in starting coffee co-operative societies in their respective divisions. The Gatanga, Gatukuyu, Gatundu, Gatitu and Kiamwangi were the earliest primary co-operative societies to be formed (see chapter three). Collectively these societies formed the Kiambu Coffee Growers Co-operative Union Ltd (hereafter Union). The Union coordinated these societies and acted as an intermediary to the umbrella body, the Kenya Coffee Planters Co-operative Union (KPCU).

As we noted in the previous chapter, co-operative societies were responsible for wet processing and marketing coffee. Co-operative societies played an important role in processing and marketing coffee on behalf of farmers. Coffee farmers were organised into co-operative societies. They bought shares in certain co-operatives to secure membership. Once membership was secured, farmers could deliver their coffee to the

ready for drying under the sun for one month. Coffee is delivered to KPCU as parchment for secondary processing. At the mill, parchment is cleaned or hulled, polished, colour sorted, graded, liquoured, cupped and classified. Coffee is graded into E, AA, AB, TT, BP and C in a descending order of quality. Grading is done manually through a sieve and is determined by the shape and the size. Liquoring is done by roasting, grounding and tasting. Subsequently coffee is classified into classes 1-10, the lower the class the higher the quality.

[18] KNA/MR/2/84: Kiambu Coffee Growers Co-operative Union 1954-57.

society for processing and marketing. Three months after coffee had been delivered to the KPCU co-operative societies made the first payment to farmers. Usually three interim payments were made in a year before the fourth and final payment which was for *mbuni*.[19] The initial three payments were referred to as coffee advance payment (CAP) and were made even before the KPCU had sold the coffee parchment. The co-operatives availed 'debt stores' to farmers. This was an arrangement through which farms procured farm inputs through check-off from their respective primary societies.

The various co-operative societies built coffee factories using money raised through shares and later loans from the coffee marketing bodies. For example, the Gatukuyu Coffee Growers Co-operative Society in Kamwangi division, with a membership of 449 was registered on 20 July 1959.[20] Using shares raised by members the society put up a factory at a cost of Sh.57, 000.[21] This was no mean feat given the level of membership.

African coffee farmers were enthusiastic about coffee farming. This was evident in the acreage that came under coffee production in the first five years after Africans were allowed to grow coffee. In 1957, the acreage under African coffee production stood at 15,000 acres while that of European areas stood at 10,000 acres.[22] Thika district alone accounted for nearly 69 percent of the acreage under coffee in the highlands in 1960.[23] This trend continued and "output from [African] smallholders rose from K£5.2 million in 1955 to K£14.0 million in 1964, coffee alone being

[19] *Mbuni* refers to an unpruned coffee berry that has dried in the sun. Production of a lot of it is an indication of a diseased or neglected crop.

[20] KNA/MR/3/38: Gatukuyu Coffee Growers Co-operative Society 1957-59.

[21] *Ibid*.

[22] KNA/GH/2/1: Coffee General 1957-63.

[23] KNA/BV/23/67: Kiambu District Annual Report 1960.

responsible for 55 per cent of this rise".[24] Table 4.1 the shows levels of coffee production in the various divisions in Thika district between 1955 and 1961.

Table 4.1: Levels of Coffee Production in Thika District 1955-61[25]

Area	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959	1960	1961
Thika	5,605	2,759	4,269	2,923	3,529	4,462	7,134
Ruiru	5,235	3,221	3,922	3,902	3,382	4,678	9,860
Makuyu	760	765	630	686	591	784	-
Donyo Sabuk	938	512	508	825	866	785	3,334
Mitubiri	1,220	859	851	824	837	1,235	158

Farmers in Ruiru exhibited exemplary husbandry, having gained skills through their many years as workers on white-owned coffee estates.[26] In Makuyu division, much of the land remained under white ownership and the entry of Africans into coffee farming was negligible. In 1959, Thika district produced half of the colony's coffee worth £2,298,780.[27] The coffee that was grown in the African areas was of high quality. For instance, in 1960, the first year that the society started its operations the Kiambu Cash Crop Officer commended Gatukuyu Co-operative Society for producing high quality coffee.[28] This marked the beginning of a society that was to become a major source of livelihood for most residents of Kamwangi division.

Coffee: The 'Lifeline' of Thika, 1963-1977

At independence, Kenya embraced a mixed economy. The economy became more market-oriented, supportive of the private sector, and open to foreign investment. This

[24] Michael Chege, "The Political Economy of Agrarian Change in Central Kenya," in Michael G. Schatzberg (ed.) *The Political Economy of Kenya* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1987), p. 101.

[25] KNA/BV/6/559: Coffee Statistics 1959-62.

[26] KNA/BV/23/67: Kiambu District Annual Report 1960.

[27] KNA/AMC/14/12: Thika District Annual Reports 1955-61.

[28] KNA/MR/3/38: Gatukuyu Coffee Growers Co-operative Society 1957-59.

is not to say that the state did not exercise some stringent controls in key sectors of the economy. The primacy of the state in facilitating the growth of capitalism and its accompanying contradictions continued. In as much as the agricultural policies were based on policies outlined in the *Sessional Paper No. 10,* which emphasised political equality, social justice and human dignity, much of the decision-making on agricultural policy depended entirely on the state. What therefore followed was the emergence of 'primitive accumulation' which was driven by the politics of patrimonialism.

From the outset, coffee production and pricing policies were state-controlled. Members of the Kikuyu community had leverage over the rest of the communities because of their overarching influence in the government. They were therefore able to mobilise funds, access economic opportunities that were offered by independence (Kenyanisation) and they had the entire machinery of the state at their disposal, which they used to their advantage in many ways.

First, it was not by default that African participation in estate farming in the highlands was purely an elitist exercise. Indeed the new settlers were almost exclusively local and national level politicians, civil servants, businessmen, those in managerial cadres in private industry and later the armed forces. The political and economic power convergence through the acquisition of property saw the emergence of a landed oligarchy, which was not only sympathetic to the principles underlying the political economy of capitalist production, but which in fact held substantial investments in the agricultural sector. The change of guard was evident in the continuity of agrarian law as an aspect of the wider process of the continuity of the colonial political economy as a whole.[29] Second, the basic principles underlying colonial agrarian law institutions and administrative goals were retained. Expectations that an African government would be more responsive to the socio-economic problems in African areas were justifiably high but these were soon shattered as the landed elite undercut those expectations.[30]

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[29] H.W.O. Okoth-Ogendo, *Tenants of the Crown* (Nairobi: ACTS Press, 1991), p.163.

[30] *Ibid*, p.164.

Third, the principle of comparative advantage was the preferred economic strategy that the Kikuyu coffee-growing elite adopted and sustained until 1978. This principle provided a compelling economic rationale for policies that delivered the greater share of the country's agro-economic resources and inputs to the wealthier, export-oriented farmers of Central Province.[31] Kenya's coffee growers had virtually complete freedom to organise and manage their own affairs under the broad mantle of friendly governmental supervision. From the Kenya Farmers Association (KFA), which was responsible for purchasing and distributing inputs including tools, fertilisers and pesticides, the Kenya Coffee Growers Association (KCGA), pressured the government, among other matters, for a reduced export tax on coffee and exemption from local county taxes. The farmers were paid the CAP even before KPCU had sold the parchment. The money was spent on domestic needs as well as in purchase of farm inputs.[32]

Heyer notes that the marketing system, together with the government's policy, had a significant impact on the structure of coffee production, as resources were tied up in an efficient coffee production.[33] Beyond the institutional level, there were close links between the coffee farmers and the bureaucratic elite who were also key coffee farmers. For instance, Kenyatta's brother, James Muigai, was initially a delegate to the Coffee Marketing Board of Kenya before assuming chairmanship of the Coffee Board of Kenya.[34] The agricultural organisation had intra-relations that created harmony and pulled together for the betterment of the coffee industry. Coffee farmers were also linked to Kenya's officialdom through social ties. The end result was a sense of shared interest between the coffee growers and government officials. The symbiotic relationship between the state and well-to-do farmers was a source of motivation for the latter. The smallholders benefitted by virtue of association with an elite whose economic power was anchored in the coffee industry.

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[31] Lofchie, 'The Politics of Agricultural Policy', p.159.

[32] KNA/MR/2/84: Kiambu Coffee Growers Co-operative Union 1954-57.

[33] Heyer, 'The Marketing System' in Heyer, *Agricultural Development*, p.344.

[34] KNA/MR/2/84: Kiambu Coffee Growers Co-operative Union 1954-57.

As a result of the prevailing conducive policy environment, the coffee sector blossomed to become a main source of livelihood for the people of Thika. The growth of the sector was marked by a proliferation of coffee factories, located in intervals of between five and ten kilometers.[35] In addition, there was a remarkable expansion of acreage under the coffee crop and a concomitant increase in coffee production between the 1960s and 1970s.

The 1960s witnessed a remarkable increase in the number of coffee growers in the district. By this time Gatukuyu, Gatundu and Kiamwangi co-operative societies had 5,000, 2,034 and 2,191 members respectively.[36] This contributed to the significant increase in the number of licensed smallholder coffee growers, which rose from 3,000 in the 1930s to 133,000 occupying 270,000 acres of land in 1968.[37] The increase in membership reflected coffee production in the smallholder sector. By the late 1960s, production of arabica coffee on African smallholdings accounted for well over half of all Kenyan production, whereas in 1957 (when separate statistics for smallholder production first appeared), it had accounted for just nine percent. In absolute terms the growth was less than a thousand tons of clean coffee in 1955/6 to over 20,000 tons by the end of the 1960s.[38] Even with increased acreage, farmers ensured that quality, the bottom line for coffee profits was not compromised. To ensure quality coffee production spraying and mulching were carried out promptly by a majority of the farmers. Hence, the contribution made by Kenya to the world coffee promotion committee for the year 1967/68 amounted to US$ 104,765.85, which was calculated at the rate of 15 US cents per bag on the effective export entitlement for the coffee year 1966/67.[39] A comparison of the performance of the small-scale and large-scale producers in the first decade of independence showed how competitive coffee farming had become. Table 4.2 compares coffee production in the small and large scale sectors in the first decade of independence.

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[35] *Ibid.*

[36] KNA/MC/11/46: Kiambu District Department of Agriculture 1966.

[37] *Ibid.*

[38] *Ibid.*

[39] *Ibid.*

Table 4.2: Coffee Production in Kenya 1963-74 ('000 metric tons)[40]

Year	Estate Production	Smallholders Production	Total Production
1964	24.8	16.6	41.4
1965	23.1	16.2	39.3
1966	28.4	28.5	56.9
1967	19.2	28.8	48.0
1968	18.8	20.8	39.6
1969	26.8	25.6	52.4
1970	27.9	30.4	58.3
1971	31.5	28.6	59.5
1972	34.2	27.8	62.0
1973	35.1	36.1	71.2
1974	30.8	39.3	70.1

The large-scale sector dominated in the first years of independence mainly because relatively developed farm infrastructure, such as mechanisation and irrigation, which was inherited from white farmers. The small-scale sector held its sway between 1967 and 1968, and almost equalled that of the large-scale sector in 1969. On average the small-scale sector produced about 40 percent of the total coffee output, although production fluctuated over the years due to varying circumstances.[41] The inability of the smallholders to control pests contributed to low levels of production in some of the bad years.[42]

The progress at the production level was translated into improved standards of living among the farmers. The benefits trickled down to the individual farmers whose income was raised, their food security guaranteed and by extension national stability

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[40] W.M. Senga, 'Kenya's Agricultural Development' in Heyer, *Agricultural Development*, p.81.

[41] The effects of the weather, disease and lack of credit sometimes acted against the small-scale sector. During periods of drought, large-scale farms irrigated their fields, which most small-scale farmers could not afford to do.

[42] RoK, *Economic Survey 1970*, p.67.

maintained. By the end of the 1960s, coffee represented 30 percent of total exports in money terms and over 20 percent of the value of Kenya's marketed agricultural products.[43] The sector was also a source of regular employment for over half a million people, excluding the large number of casual labourers who found employment within the industry.[44] Statistics from the Central Province Annual Report of 1968 showed that 'the overall family income stood at £33.09 rising from £9.22 per family due to an increase in the value of coffee, tea, vegetables, maize and cotton.[45] Evidence adduced from the peoples' ability to pay school fees, install water tanks, build fences and schools partly reflects the prosperity derived from coffee farming. More importantly, coffee farmers obtained money from their respective co-operatives to service bank loans, some of which was spent on buying more land or investing in lucrative businesses. It was evident from the interviews that most farmers were nostalgic for the prosperity they enjoyed in the 1960s.[46]

Notwithstanding the impressive performance of the co-operative societies, there were isolated cases of corruption and embezzlement within these institutions. The Gatukuyu Co-operative Society was among the first societies to be involved in graft. Many cases are reported whereby the clerks in this society flouted the laid down procedures for the processing of loans and falsified accounts in favour of the management committees.[47] To safeguard the co-operatives, more stringent regulations and reforms were introduced by the government in the mid-1960s.

In 1966 the Co-operative Societies Act was passed. The Act introduced reforms in the co-operative movement. First, the Act gave the Commissioner for Co-operative Development (CCD) sweeping powers. The CCD and his officials were to exercise control over the affairs of primary and district co-operative societies. Second, they were entitled to inspect the books and premises of primary societies. The district

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[43] *Ibid.*

[44] *Ibid.*

[45]KNA/Central Province, Annual Report 1969, p.53.

[46] Personal Communication, Naomi Wamucii, Gatundu, 23 April 2002.

[47] KNA/MR/3/38: Gatukuyu Coffee Growers Co-operative Society 1959-67.

unions and primary societies were expected to submit monthly trial balances to the CCD. Third, the CCD was responsible for the appointment and terms of service of all primary society graded staff. The Unions' chief officers became co-signatories, with the co-operative officers, to all financial transactions of primary societies. Fourth, the CCD could take action to remove management committees and to replace them with his own appointed committees for a limited period of time in the interest of efficiency.[48] The Act formed the basis on which the co-operative movement was to operate till the late 1990s. The performance and shortcomings of co-operatives in Thika in future decades are gauged against these stipulations and are covered in the remainder of this chapter.

As a follow up to the Co-operative Act, union banking sections (UBSs) were opened in the 1970s. The UBS carried out all transactions relating to savings and credit services to farmers on behalf of the union and the primary societies. Between 1970 and 1977 the Gatundu and Kiganjo Co-operative Society UBSs were opened while other primary societies were served by a mobile USB. The record success experienced in the coffee industry was also a product of the ready availability of capital. The co-operative societies readily accessed loans which were advanced to the small-scale farmers.[49] Farmers easily obtained fertilisers and other inputs from their respective societies and this enhanced higher productivity reported in the district at the time.[50] Additionally, the co-operative societies advanced loans to farmers who were on the brink of losing their land through auction by commercial banks for non-payment of loans.[51] For much of the 1970s coffee farming was lucrative and farmers were guaranteed loans through their respective societies.

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[48] Edward Karanja, 'The Problem of Amalgamating Co-operative Societies-the Case of Northern Tetu' in Gosta Widstrand, (ed.) *African Co-operatives and Efficiency* (Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1972), p.136.

[49] Reports from most societies have a positive record of their experiences with the AFC as a financier of agriculture.

[50] KNA/MA/12/16: Kiambu District Annual Report 1973, p.10.

[51] KNA/MR/2/92: Kiambu Coffee Growers Co-operative Union 1975-77.

In most cases, co-operatives were able to obtain loans from the KPCU and Co-operative Bank of Kenya. In case of emergencies, societies held special AGMs to pass supplementary budgets. To a certain extent co-operative societies enjoyed some level of financial stability, as was manifested in the accessibility of various forms of loan and credit facilities to coffee farmers. For example, through the UBS system, a farmer could obtain credit worth at least 10 percent of his or her annual gross payment. The fact that farmers were credit-worthy earned them not only income, but social prestige and respect in society.

The 1970s witnessed further increases in both quality and quantity in coffee production. Individual farmers benefitted from coffee production as did the primary societies. In 1971/72 coffee earnings in Kiambu district amounted to Sh.23, 296,783 the following year the earnings rose to Sh.35, 220,404, representing a remarkable 51 percent increase. [52] Heyer points out that the gains from coffee production were of benefit to Kenya as a whole.[53]

The performance of Kenya's economy was anchored in the International Coffee Organisation (ICO) which was formed in 1962. This body was in-charge of regulating coffee prices globally. Through the quota system, whereby countries were expected to produce a given amount of coffee, the ICO managed to control coffee production and marketing until it collapsed in 1989. Through the operations of the ICO and enforcement of the 1962 International Coffee Agreement (ICA) Kenya's coffee fetched high prices. The enforcement of the ICA safeguarded coffee farmers against any slump. The unfolding events in the international coffee market boosted the coffee industry and the general economy in the mid-1970s.

The Coffee Boom, 1975-79

Coffee production in Kenya reached its peak in 1976/7 during the coffee boom that was occasioned by a severe frost that wiped out nearly three quarters of the coffee harvest in Brazil. This resulted in a shortage of coffee worldwide and consequently prices soared. A ton of coffee fetched between Sh. 12,000 and 14,000 which was

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[52] RoK, Kiambu District Annual Report 1973, p.10.

[53] Heyer, 'The Marketing System' in Heyer, *Agricultural Development in Kenya*, p.344.

double the earnings of the previous season.[54] In 1976, Kenya earned £103.5 million from coffee sales and at the height of the boom (January-June 1977) an extra £30 million was earned.[55] The massive inflow of money from coffee enabled the country to move from a deficit of Sh. 303 million on her balance of payments in 1975 to a surplus Sh.710 million in 1976.[56] The coffee boom was a landmark in Kenya's economy as it 'brought unprecedented prosperity to independent Kenya'.[57] Coffee had become Kenya's 'black gold'.[58]

At the district level, Kiambu Union accessed a loan of over Sh. 4 million from the CBK and KPCU, based on the deliveries made by the 10 societies affiliated to the Union.[59] In total, the societies had accrued over Sh. 20 million from the sale of 20,664,122 kgs of coffee in 1975/76.[60] The effects of the boom were widely felt in the whole of the Kenyan economy.

First, the boom transformed rural livelihoods on more than one account. In April 1977, the Minister for Agriculture, J.J. Nyaga, acknowledged that using returns from coffee sales:

> Most of the average families in the coffee-growing areas were for years now able to send their children to school, build better houses and afford other things over and above what one might call the basic necessities in life through coffee growing. Coffee had helped to transform subsistence farming. Where our people once grew maize, beans, cabbages and other crops only for their own immediate use and own consumption today there was productive farming

[54] KNA/MR/2/92: Kiambu Coffee Growers Co-operative Union 1975-1977.

[55] *Weekly Review*, 22 August 1977, p.15.

[56] *Ibid.*

[57] *The Times*, 4 October 1977, p.20.

[58] In the mid-1970s coffee was christened 'black gold' because of the lucrative returns that it accrued at the international market.

[59] KNA/MR/2/92: Kiambu Coffee Growers Co-operative Union 1975-1977.

[60] *Ibid.*

> whereby they could expect to get cash in order to uplift their standard of living.[61]

The returns made from coffee enabled most farmers to send their children to secondary schools and universities locally as well as overseas. This was evident from most farmers who referred to the boom as the source of the wealth that they enjoyed in later decades.[62] Coffee farmers became tycoons and commanded a lot of respect in their own communities. The farmers built mansions, bought cars and their lifestyle changed overnight. Although our concern is not the elite farmers, it was clear that for the small-scale farmers a livelihood was guaranteed. The level of poverty was low or to an extent negligible especially for those who owned a few coffee bushes. Crop advance payment was made every three months hence one could incur a debt and still be viewed as credit worthy even by the shopkeepers. Second, coffee farmers used their extra income to hire additional agricultural labour, thereby stimulating rural employment. Overall, at least 300,000 coffee growers derived their livelihood directly from the crop whilst another 200,000 benefitted indirectly from the sector through employment.[63]

Third, 'with the inflow of more income from the sale of coffee and other products, self-help projects were initiated or ongoing ones completed'.[64] Much private income was also invested in the development of social services and construction of *harambee* schools.[65] The Murang'a District Commissioner, F.K. Mbaabu, commended farmers in the area for having invested the cash in *harambee* projects. The farmers in Murang'a accrued Sh.101, 860,675.80 from the coffee bonanza.[66] In government-aided schools, the parents' association collected money through *harambee* for the

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[61] *Weekly Review*, 25 April 1977, p.21.

[62] Personal Communication, Ngugi wa Ndonga, Kamwangi, 23 April 2002.

[63] *Weekly Review*, 25 April 1977, p.21.

[64] KNA/XA: Murang'a District Annual Report 1977.

[65] Lofchie, 'The Politics of Agricultural Policy', p.141 and York Bradshaw, 'State Limitations, Self-Help Secondary Schooling and Development in Kenya', *Social Forces,* 72, 2 (1993), pp.353, 355.

[66] *Daily Nation*, 10 January 1976.

purpose of constructing schools. In addition, the government introduced free milk to all school children. In 1979 the government introduced free primary education which saw school enrolment go up by 13 percent.[67] A milk-programme was also introduced for all primary school pupils countrywide.

Fourth, business thrived because there was a surplus of money in circulation from the coffee sales. A report from the Thika District Trade Development Officer (DTDO) showed that 'all kinds of business were doing well due to the fact that farmers had turned to buying textile goods for their families'.[68] The period was also characterised by a high demand for and shortage of construction materials such as nails, cement and corrugated iron sheets created by the rise in demand.[69] 1977/78 is on record as 'one of the best years as far as national income was concerned'.[70] More loans were advanced by the ICDC which had become popular with people who invested in industry as well as in commercial enterprises.

Trading centres teemed with activity as people had money to spend. Shops and new businesses were opened. Bars and butcheries in Kiambu benefitted from the excess money in circulation. With the boom, the coffee farmers were referred to as *itonga cia kahua* (Kikuyu for the coffee tycoons).[71] Lastly, the boom was a catalyst in the process of 'Kenyanisation', already discussed in chapter one. The transfer to African capital of urban real estate which was already well advanced by 1976 received a fresh impetus from the sudden rise in liquidity. Leys observed that 'there was a rush to purchase the remaining foreign-owned large office blocks in Nairobi, suggesting that the complete African occupation of this sector was no longer a distant prospect'.[72]

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67 RoK, *Economic Survey 1979* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1979), p.173.

68 KNA/AMC/14/17: Thika Division Annual Reports 1974-1976.

69 KNA/XA/Murang'a District Annual Report 1977.

70 KNA/Kiambu District Trade and Supplies Annual Report 1979.

71 Personal Communication, Muiru Njangiru, Gatundu, 27 April 2002.

72 Colin Leys,'Accumulation, Class Formation and Dependency' in Martin Fransman (ed.) *Industry and Accumulation in Africa* (New York: Heinemann, 1982), p.178.

Cash accrued from the coffee boom enabled farmers to buy out foreigners who owned the large-scale coffee farms in the Gatanga division.[73]

The Union invested coffee money in diverse ways, among them, the Umoja Inn, Kahawa House, Marige Banking Service and other business ventures which generated an extra income for its members.[74] Another dividend that was not directly linked to the success in the industry was that through a cess fee that was paid to the Kiambu County Council (KCC) roads were frequently repaired, particularly those in the coffee growing areas. In 1975, for example, the KCC received Sh.5 million from the Union for repair of all weather roads in the district.[75]

The coffee boom had negative effects too. First, it led to an increase in money supply in the country, resulting in inflation and a loss of fiscal discipline. The total money supply in circulation and all deposits, except those of government and non-resident banks, rose from Sh.7, 051 million in February 1976 to Sh.9, 325 million in 1977.[76] After the boom the prices of essential commodities rose sharply. Hard on the heels of the boom was an inflation of between 10 and 17 percent that hit the country in 1978.[77] The prices of goods rose by at least 7 percent and scarcity of essential commodities followed. Meat, cooking fat, rice, tea leaves, wheat flour and other consumables were scarce following 'a big rush for consumer goods'.[78] Prices for clothing, footwear, rentals, furniture as well as the cost of health care shot up.[79] This marked the beginning of harder times for a peasantry that relied entirely on a single cash crop, the future of which seemed to have reached a dead end.

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[73] *Daily Nation*, 10 January 1976.

[74] *Ibid.*

[75] KNA/MR/2/92: Kiambu Coffee Growers Co-operative Union 1975-1977.

[76] RoK, *Economic Survey 1979*, p.58.

[77] *Ibid.*

[78] KNA/XA/Murang'a District Annual Report 1977.

[79] *Ibid*.

Second, during the coffee boom theft of parchment became unbridled throughout the country. Smuggling of coffee from Uganda was so prevalent that the coffee boom became associated with the inception of *magendo* (Kiswahili for black market).[80] In Kiambu district farmers were suspicious of the dealings of the Union and feared that the officials could easily conspire with the coffee smugglers and steal their coffee. Consequently, the farmers set up vigilante groups to keep watch over their coffee in the factories throughout the district.

Third, the boom widened the fissures already existing in the Union and culminated in several splits in the co-operative movement in the district. The first step in the disintegration was made by farmers in the Gatundu, Gatukuyu, Kiamwangi, Komothai and Gatitu Co-operative Societies. In 1975, some representatives from the Union visited the London market and discovered that the money that was paid to farmers was much less than the amount paid by the coffee roasters.[81] They embarked on a shout-down with the Union leaders accusing them of embezzlement and betrayal of the farmers' interests. They sent a delegation to President Kenyatta seeking permission to break away from the Union. After lengthy consultations, Kenyatta declared 'there was no law which prevented societies from disassociating from the parent union'.[82] To the five disgruntled societies, this was a go-ahead for secession. They broke away from the Union and established direct links with the KPCU. This marked the beginning of splits and secessions which characterized the co-operative movement in the district in the decades to come.

Lastly, hard on the heels of the boom was the second oil crisis of 1979-80, which left Kenya in a serious balance of payment crisis that plunged the country into foreign debt. The origin of Kenya's economic difficulties was ironically a boom during 1976 to 1977 in coffee and tea prices which the government allowed to feed through into the private sector, and followed by heavy international borrowing (including variable interest rate re-cycled petro-dollars) and expansion of public recurrent expenditure and investment in parastatals. The loss of fiscal discipline plunged Kenya into serious

[80] *Ibid.*

[81] *Daily Nation*, 10 January 1976.

[82] *Ibid.*

economic crisis and debt. When the coffee price fell sharply in 1979, a balance of payments deficit quickly emerged which drove Kenya first to the IMF and then in 1980 to the World Bank for external finance and which affected what was then perceived as a well-managed economy.[83]

Kenya's expenditure rose much faster than revenue which was not sufficient to cover the annual population growth of about four percent.[84] The returns from the coffee boom were perceived as permanent additional resources and not saved but used to finance expanded government programmes and additional recruitment. The oil crisis of the late 1970s was perceived as temporary and, therefore, financed without implementing any long-term adjustment. In the next section we will focus on the performance of the coffee sector in the post-boom period.

The Collapse of the Coffee Industry, 1980-1991

After ascending to power in 1978, President Moi declared that his policies (*nyayoism*) were to be in line with those of his predecessor. This was, however, not really the case. After 1980 major reforms were introduced in the agricultural sector, particularly in respect to the coffee industry. For the much of the Moi era which ended in 2002, Kenya's export sector was viewed more instrumentally as a source of economic resources to be used for the development of other agricultural sectors.

To stifle the economies of Central Province, the Kikuyu stronghold, Moi explicitly used the Kenya Farmers Association, the CBK and the banking sector. The specific mechanics have been described as follows:

> [t]he political ascendancy of the Moi regime marked the political decline of those from the rich, cash-cropping hinterland of Central Province. Signifying the end of their primacy was the way in which the government sought to cover the losses made by the co-operatives in the West in their efforts to purchase

[83] John Toye, 'Interest Group Politics and Adjustment' in Peter Gibbon, Yusuf Bangura and Arve Ofstad (eds.) *Authoritarianism, Democracy and Adjustment: The Politics of Economic Reform in Africa* (Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1992), p.115.

[84] I.M.D. Little, R. Copper, Max Gorden and S.Rajapatirana, *Boom, Crisis and Adjustment. The Macroeconomic Experience of Developing Countries* (World Bank, 1995), pp. 41, 84.

> grain. It required that the wealthy coffee and dairying co-operatives, most of which are located in the Central Province, shift their members' savings from commercial banks to the Co-operative Bank.[85]

Coffee farmers were urged to deposit their money with the Co-operative Bank and the returns from coffee were invested in other sectors with little relevance to the coffee sub-sector.[86] This was the beginning of government's meddling in the coffee industry. As President Moi tried to diminish his dependence on the Kikuyu, he was more open to the interests of the petty bourgeoisie broadly speaking, although there was an inclination towards the Kalenjin. [87]

Whilst corruption predates the 1980s, it was in the Moi era that anarchy became characteristic of the co-operatives. Corrupt officials worked in cahoots with unscrupulous members to defraud societies. High levels of illiteracy amongst the coffee farmers only made it easy for the fraudsters. The few elites and politicians easily gained entry into the management of co-operatives. Indeed, a former chairman of the Gatukuyu Society rose to become the area MP, a career which he built as an official of the giant co-operative. He is however accused of having looted the society which today is under receivership.[88] This is not unique to Thika. Gyllstrom's review of co-operative societies in Kenya reveals that there was a 'bias to advantage the privileged strata of smallholders'.[89] At the expense of the peasants, politicians lined their own pockets and entrenched local clienteles. In an attempt to address the problem Moi issued a decree in the early 1980s that banned civil servants and full-time politicians from election to or campaigning for co-operative committee

[85] Robert Bates, *Beyond the Miracle of the Market: The Political Economy of Agrarian Development in Kenya* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p.137.

[86] Cheche Kenya, *Independent Kenya* (London: Zed Books, 1982), p.56.

[87] David Leonard, 'Class Formation and Agricultural Development' in Joel Barkan, (ed.) *Politics and Public Policy in Kenya and Tanzania* (New York: Praeger, 1984), p.166.

[88] *Daily Nation*, 30 April 2005.

[89] Bjorn Gyllstrom, *State Administered Change: Agricultural Co-operatives in Kenya* (London: Routledge, 1991), p.273.

membership.[90] This state-led intervention led to the reorganisation of societies from being elitist or being managed by non-coffee farmers to reverting to societies that were controlled by actual coffee farmers as was the case in the 1950s. The explicit motive was overly political because in 1986 Moi rescinded the ban, presumably to enable a new generation of local politicians to entrench themselves. This was geared towards disempowering the coffee farmers who were mainly Kikuyu. Indeed "Moi's administration ... view[ed] agricultural policy as a means to deliver economic benefits to other ethnic and regional groups in Kenya" - especially the Kalenjin and their political allies.[91]

The politicisation of the coffee industry was mirrored in squabbles and wrangles which at times erupted into violent chaos in the district. From 1983, the government had wanted to merge the KPCU and the CBK. The government was uncomfortable, particularly with the powers wielded by the KPCU by virtue of its operation both as a private company and co-operative union. This made the KPCU way beyond control of the CCD as the Moi regime would have desired. Hence in 1987, an attempt was made to dissolve it and replace it with a National Coffee Farmers Union. The World Bank proposed that the monopoly enjoyed by the KPCU as commission agents be broken and in its place the Co-operative Bank be elevated to the role of the main intermediary between the CBK as monopoly buyer and the cooperative societies. Unusually, in this case the Kenya government sided with the donors and the reform was pushed through against strong opposition from the KPCU.[92] The government was quite hesitant to introduce economic reforms in the marketing of cereals owing to its vested interests. The decision was only rescinded after farmers from Central and Eastern Provinces vehemently protested, but that was not the end of their struggles.

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[90] Karuti Kanyinga, 'Ethnicity, Patronage and Class in a Local Arena: "High" and "Low" Politics in Kiambu, Kenya, 1982-92' in Karuti Kanyinga, Andrew Kiondo and Per Tidemand, (eds.) *The New Local Level Politics in East Africa* (Stockholm: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, Research Paper No. 95, 1994), p.104.

[91] David W. Throup, "The Construction and Destruction of the Kenyatta State," in Schatzerg, *The Political Economy of Kenya,* pp. 33 - 74.

[92] Peter Gibbon, 'A Failed Agenda? African Agriculture Under Structural Adjustment with Special Reference to Kenya and Ghana', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 20, 1 (1992), pp.64, 78.

Another setback for the industry was the dissolution of the KCGA in 1989.[93] The KCGA championed the interests of coffee farmers. The ban was imposed because the association had pointed out the government's meddling in coffee affairs. Also, on several occasions, the government put the management of the KPCU and CBK under political appointees who catered for the vested interests of the government. For instance, the chairman of the CBK was nominated by the government and was answerable to the Minister of Agriculture. The government undercut the operations of the Union and bankrupted its accounts. Having entrenched itself in the affairs of the coffee institutions, money belonging to farmers was diverted into projects that were not relevant to coffee farming. This translated into delays in the payment of farmers, inaccessibility of credit facilities, and scarcity of agricultural inputs.

The government rode roughshod over coffee farmers, running the industry without any reference to coffee farmers. In September 1999, in a very suspect move, the government sacked the entire panel of directors of the CBK, basing their decision on allegations of corruption.[94] Instead of calling for fresh elections from its members, the government imposed its own directors, in complete contravention of the Coffee Act, Cap 333 of the Laws of Kenya. The structural changes that were effected at the national level impacted on the co-operatives, responsible for the day-to-day running of the coffee industry. As already mentioned, the Co-operative Act of 1966 bestowed a lot of powers on the CCD or his officials and the protocol was counterproductive in most cases. This caused delays in procurement of essential equipment, sometimes with adverse effects on the processing of coffee.

The Act denied the management committees the power to sack the staff in the co-operatives. This had grievous effects on the running of the societies. For example, when clerks in the factories were engaged in underhand dealings, such as fraud and misappropriation, the most the management committee could do was to transfer such clerks to other factories. The recycled unscrupulous staff undermined the co-operatives in the district. The loopholes were abused by clerks who ended up fleecing factories under the management of a particular society. Rarely were such cases

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[93] *Weekly Review*, April 7 1989, p.24.

[94]*Daily Nation*, 14 December 2001.

prosecuted. Farmers felt that their money was handled by people in whom they had no trust yet there was little the government did to protect the interests of the farmers. The clerks were infamous for keeping poor records of deliveries by coffee farmers and in cheating them.

The moment the staff working in the co-operatives discovered the flaws in the Act they capitalised on them to undermine the co-operative movement by lining their own pockets. The recruitment of co-operatives staff was characterised by nepotism and parochialism. The people in the management committees recruited their own kith and kin and rarely advertised vacant posts. In most cases, the people who were recruited had no relevant knowledge of coffee processing. Consequently, reports that the quality of the coffee had been ruined at the wet processing stage became rampant because at times different grades of coffee were wrongly mixed. Such negligence was traced to inept staff in factories where much of the manual work at the factory called for a high level of dexterity.[95] In such circumstances, losses were inevitably passed on to farmers irrespective of them having no control over what happened to their coffee after delivering it to the factories. Lack of a stable financial standing and escalating corruption was not viewed passively by the members. They threatened to respond by asking:

> How are we going to work on these fruitless trees? We will immediately stop maintaining these trees and we will see what will happen to the economy of this country….A member paid Sh.4000 will have it deducted. These leaders… have no mercy ….on members.[96]

The farmers were afraid that their returns would be deducted to repay the 'debt stores' and leave them with no income at all. Previously farmers depended on the crop advance payment to meet many of their financial obligations which have already been mentioned. The fear of embezzlement and over deductions stalked many farmers who could no longer be sure that their livelihoods could be guaranteed from coffee returns. Accordingly, farmers threatened to neglect their coffee bushes and were certain that this would have an impact on the national economy. A visit by the CCD on 25

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95 KNA/MR/2/42: Gatukuyu Coffee Growers Co-operative Society 1981-83.

96 *Ibid.*

January 1982 did not resolve the issues that beleaguered the society. Reports from other societies abound with similar fears and malpractices, but there was little action on the part of the government to stem misappropriation or put an end to the flouting of the co-operative regulations. In time anarchy and misrule governed the co-operatives.

Although co-operatives are said to be democratic organisations governed according to the principle of one vote per member during an AGM, greed has hampered their functioning. Elections are delayed and when called are marred by buying of votes and outright rigging. In the Kiamwangi Co-operative Society, elections were not held between 1975 and 1981. When such an illegitimate management committee was in office for over five years, major operations of the society were ruined by fraud and corruption. To date management committees continue to run affairs without the members' mandate. The most recent case was in 1999 when members of the 3 Gs Co-operative Society rejected the directors who were in office illegally and were not ready to call for elections.[97] Such illegitimacy was accompanied by lack of transparency and accountability through which farmers lost enormous sums of money.

Rarely were tenders advertised and the management committee members awarded themselves contracts resulting in heavy deficits to the farmers. Evidently, the major factory constructions in the district were carried out by a single and shoddy contractor who was the chairman of one of the co-operative societies. The contractor's work did not comply with the laid down specifications and there were complaints about defective recirculation tanks and drying tables. The significance of the shoddy workmanship is that the quality of the coffee that was produced was determined by the tanks in which fermentation or wet processing took place. In cases of negligence and congestion, which was the norm in most factories, poor quality coffee was produced.

The procurement process was riddled with underhand dealings that saw farmers lose a lot of money. For a long time, the Union sourced its major supplies from Messrs. Kiambu Fertilisers which was owned by the manager of the Union. In the co-operative societies, the dealers colluded with the personnel to overprice farm inputs.

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[97] *Daily Nation*, June 10 1999.

In several instances societies were coerced to pay for goods that were never delivered although the clerical staff in the societies supported such claims and this incurred losses that farmers had to bear.[98] The activities of clerks that brought down co-operative societies included paying themselves allowances and advancing loans to themselves. The societies and unions were ran by commissions instituted to oversee the operations of societies plagued by mismanagement and high levels of corruption which ruined the idea of co-operative development.

After the farmers delivered coffee to the factories, they did not have control over it anymore. The co-operatives and the unions handled the coffee until it was marketed by CBK, at least until 2001 when new dealers became involved in the marketing of coffee. The production and distribution or value chain was long, involving at least five intermediaries. All five of the coffee handlers charged a fee and this ate into the coffee profits that finally reached the farmer. It was for this reason that farmers dismissed coffee farming as a loss-making undertaking.

As already mentioned, in the 1950s coffee farmers were instructed to plant coffee in pure stands, a measure that was intended to keep away pests and diseases from other crops. To a great extent this was observed up until the early 1980s. However, by the mid-1980s, farmers realised that with the plummeting coffee prices compounded by corruption in the co-operatives they could compensate for the losses by growing coffee in mixed stands. Subsequently, diseased and neglected coffee farms were widespread in the district. For instance, in 1982 all societies in Kiambu district, except Gatukuyu, Dagoretti, Karai and Mikari, recorded a decline in coffee production and an increase in *mbuni.*[99]

Nowadays coffee is interplanted with beans, maize, potatoes and more recently even napier grass. Justifiably, farmers contend that since the returns from coffee were not guaranteed and one ‘cannot feed children on coffee, it is better to plant maize and

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[98] *Ibid.*

[99] KNA/MJ/6/11: Kiambu District Annual Report 1982, pp.33, 34.

beans'. [100] Similar sentiments were expressed by farmers who argued that food crops were more lucrative than the 'fruitless tree'. The mixed stands increased the chances of infestation with CBD, leaf miner and rust.[101] This was compounded by the lack of adequate supply of fungicides previously accessed through the 'debt-stores' facility extended by most primary societies. Where farmers had some money to buy inputs, the proportions applied were normally for optimal returns. Yet, whenever coffee societies supplied inputs, it was in small amounts and gradually farmers abandoned the use of quality enhancing inputs.[102]

Changes in the international political economy, too, had deleterious effects on the coffee industry. The liberalised economy saw the government withdraw subsidies on agriculture that for a long time had sustained the sector. The high cost of production was compounded by the heavy presence of CBD and leaf rust in Kenya. In the 1990s, prices of agricultural inputs skyrocketed, compared to the prices of coffee. The cost of green copper was Sh. 14.40 in 1978 and by 1999 was costing Sh. 410, while the prices for coffee was Sh. 6 per kilogram.[103] The high cost of inputs and fear of being wrongly debited which has been alluded to, prevented farmers from obtaining inputs from the coffee factory stores.

By the mid-1980s, there were serious tensions and strife in the co-operatives. The manifestation of the collapse of the co-operative movement took the form of break-ups and splits. During the disintegration of the co-operatives, members broke away from primary societies or factories, factories split from co-operative societies, societies split from unions and, since 2001, the unions have been breaking away from the KPCU. The splits had several implications for the farmers. Some of the societies broke away from the Union leaving huge debts that the remaining societies had to bear. There were attempts to follow up repayments through the CCD, but this met

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[100] Personal Communication, Paul Ndichu, Gatundu, 3 March 2002.

[101] RoK, Kiambu District Development Plan 1979-83, p.35.

[102] RoK, Thika District Agriculture Department 1998.

[103] Murungi Kiraitu, 'Coffee and Tea Parliamentary Association-COTEPA' (A Report Prepared by the Parliamentary Accounts Committee-PAC-1999).

with limited success. An accumulation of bad debts was a major cause of financial constraints in the co-operatives. It followed that since the assets were jointly owned by the farmers such losses gradually ate into the profits of farmers and hindered the effective running of co-operative societies.

As coffee farming became a source of frustration, the acreage under coffee decreased. Some farmers uprooted their bushes, although this was against the Coffee Act. Subsequently the demand for seedlings dwindled and workers in most of the nurseries were rendered redundant and retrenched.[104] Similarly, the work force in the societies and the factories had to be rationalised in the light of the poor returns from coffee. Massive lay-offs followed and labour reports of the period reverberate with dismissals, terminations of service and retrenchments.[105]

The effect of the fall of the coffee industry extended to other crops that for a long time had been 'dependent' on coffee. As we saw in the previous chapter, other loans were granted to coffee farmers who could invest, for example, in passion fruit farming and dairy farming. With the slump, coffee could no longer 'carry the burden' of other crops. The problem was particularly acute in the lower zones of the district where coffee was basically the main source of income for a majority of the households.

Further, troubles in the coffee industry emanated from the dilapidated infrastructure in the district. Coffee farmers paid a cess fee to the respective local authorities, yet most of the feeder roads in the coffee growing areas were impassable. To throw some light on the anomaly, the District Development Committee (DDC) belatedly noted that cess money that was paid by coffee farmers in Thika went to the Murang'a County Council.[106] This was due to an anomaly that unfortunately was traced to the history of most of the coffee estates in the district which are still registered in Murang'a district and therefore pay their cess there, though they use the infrastructure in Thika. This showed that in the last almost 40 years of Kenya's independence, appropriate

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[104] RoK, Thika District Department of Agriculture Annual Report 1998.

[105] RoK, Thika District Labour Office Annual Report 1996.

[106] KNA/4/5:Thika District Development Committee 1991.

administrative transfers had not been effected. In my opinion, this is part of the interplay of politics that has governed relations between the people of the two districts (Kiambu and Murang'a) since the late 1960s. This is in line with Stamp's observation in her study of municipal politics in Thika, that intra-ethnic politics grossly undermined the development of the Thika district.[107]

In most parts of the district where roads were impassable farmers had to transport the coffee on their backs to the coffee factories located as much as five kilometres away.[108] The worst hit areas were Mundoro, Gatitu and Gatukuyu. As late as 1998, the issue of cess and dilapidated infrastructure had not been resolved and farmers still await a response from the government on how their taxes are spent.[109]

Amidst the crisis coffee farmers became impoverished and watched helplessly as their source of livelihood was ruined. Their children dropped out of school, they could not pay medical fees and development loans had become a thing of the past.[110] Most people in Thika were farmers and any rise in prices adversely affected their livelihoods. According to records from the trade office, farmers decried the high price of inputs and responded by reducing the proportion prescribed by the extension officers. Further, prices of essential commodities such as kerosene and sugar skyrocketed amidst a drastic fall in the people's purchasing power. The cumulative effect of this was a cut in family budgets and families for the first time started to experience poverty. Traders recorded low sales and blamed it on the economic hardship that the country was facing.[111]

To resuscitate the industry, the World Bank's Second Coffee Improvement Project (SCIP) of 1989-91 was introduced. The SCIP comprised two phases: a coffee factory

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107 Stamp, Patricia, 'Governing Thika: Dilemmas of Municipal Politics in Kenya' (Ph.D. Thesis, University of London, 1980), pp.100, 101.

108 Personal Communication, Lucy Wandeto, Gatundu, 23 May 2002.

109 RoK, Thika District Department of Agriculture Annual Report 1998.

110 KNA/AMC/14/15: Thika District Reports from Other Departments 1993.

111 KNA/MJ/6/11: Kiambu District Annual Report 1982.

improvement and a farm input development programme. In the case of Thika district, Sh.3.3 million was spent on the renovations of Kandino, Karuri and Githobokoni factories which belonged to the Gatukuyu Co-operative Society.[112] Although seven factories at the Kiamwangi Co-operative Society were earmarked for electrification by the end of 1983, only four had been installed with electricity.[113] This was attributed to embezzlement and abuse of the SCIP monies. [114] In spite of this farmers were forced to pay for services which they either did not receive or were not aware of.

Many of the farmers do not really know what happens in the societies. Lack of transparency in the running of the societies denies farmers access to whatever unfolds in management of the coffee institutions. The contention of a woman, who owned 500 bushes of coffee, was that 'coffee obtained good prices, but it was 'eaten' (embezzled) up there'.[115] The farmers were never informed of changes and projects that were being undertaken at any one time. Their participation was confined to an annual general meeting yet, their money was used to service loans that they never received.

Much of the money was squandered and operations in a number of coffee societies have ceased because of the diminishing returns from coffee. According to Members of Parliament (MPs) of Central Province, by 2001 'Sh. 375 million had been allocated to Coffee Factories'. The electrification programme ended up as a conduit that was used by those in the management of coffee co-operatives to impoverish the farmers further. For a long time farmers have been complaining that their proceeds go to pay for electricity which they do not have'. [116] When the SCIP project ended in 1998, most of the projects that had been initiated proved unsustainable and the Co-operative Bank is still pursuing farmers to repay the loans. Further changes that were introduced in the coffee sub-sector made farmers' lives more vulnerable and precarious.

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[112] KNA/AMC/4/3: Thika District Development Committee, 1984-86.

[113] KNA/MR/25/51: Kiamwangi Coffee Farmers Co-operative Society 1980-83.

[114] *Ibid.*

[115] Personal Communication, Jane Wangari, Kamwangi, 24 April 2002.

[116] *Daily Nation*, 30 March 2001.

Token Liberalisation in the Coffee Industry, 1992-2000

Since 1992 the government has introduced piecemeal reforms in the coffee industry. The reforms mainly targeted the marketing of coffee and not the production. The first step towards liberalisation came into force in October 1992 when the CBK was mandated to conduct the Nairobi Coffee Auction in US dollars. Farmers were also to be paid in dollars, although enquiries suggest that not a single farmer ever mentioned having been paid in dollars. A direct payment system was also introduced to reduce the delay in payments typical of the pool system. This system allowed farmers to be paid the amount their coffee fetched at the weekly Nairobi Coffee Exchange (NCE), less statutory deductions. The system is yet to bear fruits because farmers are still only paid after 90 days. Most societies still use the pool method. It is for this reason that farmers opt for shorter distribution channels such as farm gate sales. In 1994 there was a coffee boom and farmers received between Sh.10 and 12 per kilogram of clean coffee. Coffee production levels in the district were low, particularly in the small-scale sector as table 4.3 shows.

Table 4.3 Coffee Production Levels in Both Small and Large Scale Sectors in 1995[117]

Crop	Total	Yield/Ha	Total in Tons	Average prices/Ksh
Coffee S/holder	11,955	8.4	100,422	17.00
Coffee/ Estate	16,195	18.2	294,749	-

From the table there is a clear disparity in terms of yield per acre between the large- and small-scale sectors. The large-scale sector has leverage because irrigation, spraying and other forms of good husbandry are still observed to some extent. For instance, in 1995 there was reported to have been an increase in both the usage of chemicals against coffee pest and diseases and also that of fertilisers. In the large-

[117] RoK, Thika District Department of Agriculture Annual Report 1995.

scale sector mechanisation and diversification over the years cushions the estates from major shocks resulting from vagaries of weather or fluctuations in the coffee prices. Macadamia nuts, horticultural and dairy farming are some of the economic activities that coffee estates are also involved in. Notably, in some years production in the estate sector doubled that of the small-scale sector.

In 2001 the government took a further step towards the full liberalisation of the coffee industry. In this year the government took the plunge in 2001 and replaced the half-century old Coffee Act Cap 333 with the Coffee Act 2001. This entailed the freeing of the trade in coffee and new marketers were allowed in. The CBK was replaced by the KPCU in the marketing of coffee. The new registered commercial millers, namely the KPCU, Thika Coffee Mills and Socfinaf, broke the monopoly previously enjoyed by the KPCU.

However, the liberalisation of the coffee sector did not herald a new trouble-free era. Rather, new challenges besieged the coffee industry. The paradox of liberalisation was that new players (millers or marketers) were introduced at a time when coffee production had ebbed so low. Hence there was less coffee to be marketed by the many players. Moreover, although the monopoly enjoyed by the KPCU is said to have been shattered by the introduction of new players, the KPCU still controls more than 70 percent of the coffee produced in the country. This leaves a mere 30 percent to the other two millers. Moreover, the KPCU did not favour competition given its precarious and unstable financial standing.

On the part of the government there was little to lose from a collapsing coffee sector. As has been argued elsewhere, the cereal trade was all that the Moi administration was concerned about. In my opinion, the licensing of more millers at this point in time was a well calculated move to demobilise and incapacitate the coffee growing regions. Recasting of the politics of the time this was the high noon of multiparty politics in which the Kikuyu took sides which were considered unfavourable to the government.

What resulted from the reforms were the infamous ‘coffee wars’[118] of the mid-1990s. These wars were sparked by splits and counter-splits in the coffee co-operative societies. The problems of more marketers amidst a decline in coffee production were mirrored in stiff competition among the millers. The management committees were caught in the middle of the ‘scramble for coffee’, societies were divided in their loyalty over the choice of millers and this resulted in splits and the registration of new societies. The splits were driven by greed among the leaders and the desire for autonomy for a few well-to-do farmers. In 1996, there were 54 primary societies in the district and 24 co-operative societies.[119] This translated into an average of two factories per society, which was not economically viable. The increase in co-operative societies contrasts to the 1960s and 1970s when the Union boasted of 10 co-operative societies and 46 factories.[120] On average, a society had between eight and ten factories which maximised production and reduced operational costs. This was a cost that the many societies in the district could ill-afford at a time when production costs had shot upwards due to diminishing returns and loss of economies of scale. The end result was poverty and more poverty for those who entirely depended on coffee for a livelihood. In the ‘scramble for coffee’ the farmers were the chief losers.

Another effect of the reform was licensing of medium-scale farmers or those with over ten acres of land under coffee farming, to start their own private pulperies. This saw a drift of such farmers toward private coffee pulping. Statistics of the actual numbers are not easy to arrive at but the pattern is depicted in the annual reports of the various co-operatives. This was compounded by the poor performance of the coffee sector in the co-operatives as was shown in table 4.3. Most of the medium-scale farmers felt that they could do better on their own, taking the cue from the performance of the large-scale sector. There was no point in remaining in co-operatives to sink alongside the poor farmers. Essentially co-operatives remained as a last resort for the very marginal farmers who could not secede. Even then, farmgate

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[118] Most co-operative societies split up in order to fight for more liberty and negotiation in the handling of coffee. The arrival of new players in the sector such as marketers and pulperies was a welcome relief to most farmers.

[119] RoK, Thika District Department of Agriculture Annual Report 1996.

[120] KNA/MR/2/92: Kiambu Coffee Growers Co-operative Union 1975-77.

coffee sales have given the marginalised poor farmers an avenue through which to sell coffee. This has lowered the capacity utilisation of most societies. A good example is that of the Gatukuyu Co-operative Society in Kamwangi division.

In 1995, the giant Gatukuyu Coffee Growers Co-operative Society split after a protracted war between officials of the society and those from the affiliated primary societies and factories. The farmers in the upper zone, that is, Mataara, Gakui and Gakoe locations, felt that representatives from the lower zone, Gatukuyu and Kairi locations did not adequately represent their interests. Among the grievances cited by the farmers were: delays in payment, high transport costs whenever farmers attend meetings at Gatukuyu which was the society's headquarters and general inefficiency in the running of the society's affairs.

With the licensing of more millers the factories in the upper zone seceded and formed the 3 Gs- Gatei, Gathaiti and Githobokoni- and Buchana factories. This was a major split which saw membership of the Gatukuyu Society drop from over 9,000 to 3,000.[121] having been dismembered the former society changed its name to Mang'u Coffee Farmers Society, with only three factories: Kianganga, Man'gu and Nyamangara. The new society is underutilised and the expensive equipment that was bought using farmers' money lies idle at the factory. Consequently, what was once a financial lifeline of the people of Kamwangi division and beyond is today a ghost of its 1970s representation. At its peak the Gatukuyu Society had acquired assets worth Sh. 50 million.[122] A lot of money of the members' money was spent in the costly splitting which left the society under receivership.

[121] Personal Communication, Ann Waithera, Gatukuyu, June 2004.

[122] These figures were obtained from the annual reports of the various societies.

Of the 3,000 members in the New Gatukuyu Society, only about half of them deliver coffee to the three factories affiliated to the society. Production levels have plummeted to an all time low of 200,000 kgs per year.[123] This increases the production costs to the extent that, at times, farmers receive negative payment slips or a pittance of Sh.5 after a whole year's labour and investment on the farm.[124] For example, in 1995, farmers were paid between 32.0 and 66.45 percent of the gross coffee returns.[125] Processing, storage, bulking and transportation charges cumulatively took up a higher percentage of the coffee returns eating into the farmers profits and often their production costs.[126] In 2000 the cost of producing a ton of coffee was estimated at between Sh. 70,000 and 96,000 in the small- and large-scale sectors respectively which sold at only Sh.60, 000.[127] In other words, coffee does not generate enough profit to recoup the production costs at the existing market rates. Indeed it is a loss-making undertaking. Owing to lack of agricultural subsidies which previously sustained the coffee industry, trees are left to the ravages of disease before being cut down for firewood.[128] The government's withdrawal of subsidies rendered coffee farming uncompetitive. In contrast, coffee farming in Vietnam was heavily subsidised, leading to high levels of production and low prices for coffee.[129] Gradually, coffee has drifted from being a 'lifeline' for a majority in Thika to being a source of despair and frustration. Partly, this can be traced to the loss of economies of scale that resulted from the economic reforms of the 1990s.

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[123] *Ibid.*

[124] Personal Communication, Bernard Wahogo, Kamwangi, 24 April 2002.

[125] RoK, Thika District Department of Agriculture Annual Report 1996.

[126] Hezron Nyangito, 'Policy and Legal Framework for the Coffee Sub Sector and the Impact of Liberalisation in Kenya' (Nairobi: Kenya Institute of Public Policy Research and Analysis - Kippra - Policy Paper No. 2 January 2001), vii.

[127] A.M. Karanja and James Nyoro, 'Coffee Prices and Regulations and Their Impact on Livelihoods of Rural Community in Kenya' (Tegemeo/Egerton, 2002), p.23.

[128] RoK, Thika District Department of Agriculture Annual Report 2000.

[129] Oxfam, *Mugged: Poverty in Your Cup of Coffee* (Oxfam, 2002), p.18.

Presently, Thika district has among the largest number of coffee co-operatives in the country. Between 1996 and 2001 the number of societies in Thika grew from 24 to 27 in 2001. The increase may not sound alarming but evidently there was no commensurate increase in coffee production to warrant such an expansion. By implication the newly constructed factories were often under-utilised whilst the old factories were left to lie in disuse, yet they had cost farmers a lot of money as we saw in the earlier sections of this chapter.

Amidst declining coffee production poverty is entrenched among the former rich smallholder coffee farmers. My transcript of interview with Pauline offers a glimpse of the situation:

> Pauline, who looked frail and ailing, is aged 70 years and a widow. She is one of the small-scale coffee farmers and owns a 1 acre piece of land. She told me that she was among the first people to plant coffee in what is now Gatundu North. On her farm are wilted coffee bushes on which she relies for a livelihood. An inquiry into what has become of the coffee industry reveals sadness in her voice. She narrates how coffee was used to finance education for her five children who now live in Nairobi. She is quick to pinpoint that coffee is *tuhu* (Kikuyu for worthless) because no money is paid by the societies. She belonged to a break-away society. She reveals that in an ordinary year she delivers around 1,000 kg to the factory. Her grandchildren work on the farm when they are not in school. They also carry the coffee beans to the factory that is located 3 km away from the home. She could not remember the last time she received any money from the society, even though she makes deliveries. She recalls that in the past she could get fertiliser and maize from her former society, but not anymore. The clerks at the factory have been "eating" our money. Whenever they announce payments, we receive negative pay so I have decided not to attend the AGM because they do not make a difference. The chiefs and the politicians are all the same. Their agenda is one and they speak the same language. Despite repeatedly being rejected the committee members still find their way into the management of the societies.
>
> Coffee farming has turned us into *ngia* (Kikuyu for very poor or destitute). I cannot afford to pay school fees for my grandchildren. Seated on the ground is a seven-year old boy. This boy was sent away from school last week, for a mere Sh. 400 ($5), but I cannot afford to pay that money now. Pauline has a heart problem. She described her condition as one of having a 'heart that was too large', which means that it had become elongated. She had just returned from the district hospital where she sought treatment. Sometimes she writhes in pain whenever she did not have bus fare, which was about Sh. 80 or US$1. Her daily food was never guaranteed and it was worse whenever a member of the family fell ill. She could not afford the diet that had been recommended for

> her condition. Her main source of income was remittance from her son who sold second hand clothes in Nairobi.[130]

The majority of coffee farmers face a similar fate, not only in Thika, but also in Central Province where coffee farming is playing a rapidly diminishing role in household production. This applies to all social strata and not merely to the traditional poor peasantry and landless.

The enthusiasm that drove farmers into coffee farming in the 1950s has waned over the years and many of them ponder on what to do with 'fruitless' bushes which occupy so much of their arable land. Most farmers preferred to uproot it and diversify their sources of income including growing subsistence food, poultry or livestock farming. One farmer remarked that 'these farming activities are not as lucrative as coffee but it is better to watch and see your crops fail or cow die than deliver coffee to the factory and only receive a slip showing negative pay. What is even more is that you can drink milk'.[131]

The slump being experienced in the coffee industry and secessions have turned the once rich tycoons and smallholder peasants into a constant source of ridicule among other farmers and professionals. One thing that I observed in the field was that farmers are on the lookout for any 'better news' regarding coffee. They were well versed with what was happening at the policy level regarding the coffee industry. Farmers were often found keen listening to their transistor radios or reading the local dailies, mainly the *Taifa Leo*. They expressed hope that the new government, inaugurated in 2002 would look into their plight of coffee farmers favourably.

Liberalisation was intended to streamline operations in the industry but it posed challenges to coffee farmers. It did not deliver an efficient marketing channel as was envisaged. For a long time the coffee industry has been marred by underhand dealings by the many intermediaries. But even with liberalisation the role of middlemen has not been eliminated. Fraudulent dealings in the handling of coffee start even before

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[130] Personal Communication, Pauline Mugure, Kamwangi, 23 May 2002.

[131] Personal Communication, Kairu Njonjo, Gatundu, 23 April 2002.

coffee is shipped. An example is provided to highlight the dubious role of intermediaries in coffee trade. In 2002, official records showed that Kenya exported 40,050 tons of coffee at US$1.54 per ton.[132] This translated to Sh. 115 at the Nairobi Coffee Auction. But the value that was declared by exporters to the customs authorities at the port of Mombasa was Sh.511 or (US$ 6.81) per kg.[133] This suggests that even before the coffee left the country, its value had appreciated by Sh.13 billion.
The state-sponsored marketing institutions charged with the responsibility of overseeing the operations fail to safeguard what farmers so laboriously produce. The CBK, like other parastatals in the country, was in shambles and failed to protect farmers against the middlemen.[134] Under the CBK monopoly the Coffee Auction operated as a closed shop and was used to advance a political agenda. The CBK produced a private and a public report on the marketing of coffee. The 'private' report gives the actual prices at which coffee was sold and it was only made public at the end of the year after all the payments had been made to the farmers.

The farmers' agents receive the public report detailing the classes, quantities and prices for coffee sold in single lots, and the average value for pooled coffee. This is normally what the co-operatives read to farmers during the AGM as an accounts record. But most smallholders have no idea what happens in the sector and have been convinced in different ways formally and informally that their coffee fetches a low price in the market. But this does not square with the fact that the coffee business seemed to be a thriving business at the top. As production has plummeted the 'scramble' for coffee milling and marketing in Kenya ensues. Arguably, coffee is still big business if the healthy profits of between 21 and 41 percent registered by renowned coffee companies such as Starbucks and Nestle in 2001 are key indicators

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[132] Prices reported by the CBK based on Customs declarations. The average FOB prices for coffee exported to UK and USA were US$.79 and US$8.71 respectively. Average prices for Singapore, Greece, Ireland and Canada were over US$ 9.

[133] *Los Angeles Times*, October 5, 2002.

[134] Arne Bigsten, *Regional Inequality and Development: A Case Study of Kenya* (Farnborough: Gower, 1980), p.73.

on what is happening in the coffee markets. [135] Indeed it is apparent that the coffee roasters are the chief beneficiaries of globalisation.
This notwithstanding, it is significant to note that the collapse of the ICO had an adverse effect on Kenya's coffee industry. Between 1962 and 1989, the ICA had kept prices artificially high to prevent the development of pockets of poverty that third-world coffee producing regions. The ICO collapsed as soon as the cold war ended and the markets opened up and prices began to vary widely. This has meant an increasingly smaller share of the profits for farmers. Ten years ago, coffee-producing countries received about a third of every dollar spent on coffee.[136] Lower prices have definitely reduced crop size, especially among small farmers in Africa and Central America, who typically produce the arabica type beans traded in New York, but these reductions have not yet reached the scale necessary to impact on prices.[137] The crisis has become a test of globalisation, that is, whether open markets can lead to increasing wealth or not.[138] This is what Oxfam calls a failed commodity market, but there are losers and gainers in the trade. The roasters have continued to record profits and consumers have continued to pay high prices for espresso all over the world.

In this chapter we have highlighted the transformation of the coffee sector. The co-operative societies provided a channel for rural development and they were a collective means for pooling resources and spreading risks. The performance of the coffee sector in the first decade of independence was rather impressive and this had a ripple effect on other sectors of the economy. Although the well-to-do farmers developed an edge in the sector, the small scale farmers, too, prospered in the heyday of the industry.

Since the 1980s there have been significant changes in agricultural policy and this had a direct impact on coffee production. Of significance was the shift of government

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[135] Celine Charveliet, 'Bitter Coffee: How the Poor are Paying for the Slump in Coffee Prices' (Oxfam, May 2001), p.7.

[136] *Los Angeles Times*, October 5, 2002.

[137] World Coffee Outlook, 14 February 2002.

[138] *Los Angeles Times*, October 5, 2002.

policy from that of pursuing comparative advantage or export farming to that of attaining food self-sufficiency. This paved the way for political meddling in the coffee industry which served as a mechanism to disempower the Kikuyu, who were seen to be the chief beneficiaries of the coffee sector. At the local level, lack of accountability and transparency by the management committees of the coffee co-operative societies triggered leadership squabbles and secession which have continued to define the coffee co-operatives in the last two decades or so. In my view, the culture of corruption and poor governance manifested in the co-operatives was a microcosm of what was happening at the national level. At the international level, a slump that was occasioned by the entry of new producers such as Vietnam and an enhancement of production in Brazil into the market. The adoption of SAPs saw the production costs rise. As a consequence, coffee farms were neglected and returns dropped drastically. Token liberalisation did not resolve the crisis. Farmers, who had for three decades depended on coffee for a livelihood, were ruined. Dependency on a monocrop has proved to be a liability and it is only recently that farmers have started to diversify their farming activities in search of extra income to cushion their households against the vagaries of weather and the volatile coffee prices.

CHAPTER FIVE

WORKING AND LIVING CONDITIONS OF COMMERCIAL AGRICULTURAL WORKERS IN THIKA DISTRICT, 1953-2000

Thika district played a significant role in the colonial economy having been the epicentre of coffee farming which was the leading export earner in the late colonial period. To a lesser extent, sisal farming, too, was significant in the colonial economy. The first thirty years of colonial rule were marked by an expanding market for coffee hence more acreage of land was expropriated and put under cultivation. As coffee became more profitable the numbers of daily workers on the plantations rose rapidly.[1] In most estates coffee and sisal farming were carried out simultaneously although there were estates that were only involved in sisal farming, particularly in the Mitubiri and Makuyu divisions. The commercial farms were in the hands of white farmers up until the late 1960s when a black elite took over. Most of the sisal plantations ceased operations in the 1960s following a drop in prices and by the 1980s most of the former sisal estates had been converted into private residential estates.[2]

The labour was drawn from the western parts of Kenya, comprising the Luo and Luhya (lumped together and colloquially referred to as Kavirondo by the colonial officials). These two ethnic groups formed the bulk of the migrant and squatter labour and were mainly employed in the sisal plantations.[3] The Kikuyu and the Kamba, particularly those from Machakos district provided both resident and casual labour.

From the outset it is important to note that the colonial state played a pivotal role in the colonial economy. To facilitate settler farming 'appropriate' labour and taxation policies were designed by government to assist the white settlers. The participation of the government meant that settlers were entitled to assistance and it was also considered that the mandate to develop the resources of the colony should be properly discharged by government. Left to their own devices, the settlers did not have the

[1] KNA/Native Affairs Department Annual Report 1956.

[2] KNA/AMC/14/20: Thika Division Monthly Reports Other Departments 1982.

[3] KNA/DC/TKA/3/21: Thika District Information Circulars 1956-58.

means to secure and maintain the labour they needed to enforce the system. Hence by reducing land accessible to Africans they would be compelled to seek employment or become resident labourers on European farms.[4]

In all British colonies, the central state regulated relations between employers and workers through local Masters and Servants Ordinances. These were modelled on the 18th century British laws, which defined leaving or quitting work before the end of a contractually stipulated period as desertion and a punishable crime. The colonial state undertook to facilitate the labour requirements of local white employers as it did in South Africa. The system of labour recruitment and control in Kenya was described by Berman as probably the 'harshest of any British colony in West and East Africa'. [5]

To ensure that Africans stayed in employment, taxation on property or Hut tax was introduced in 1901. Every male head of a household or owner of a hut (s) had to pay 1 rupee for each.[6] Accordingly, in Kiambu the pressure exerted by the imposition of taxes pushed many Kikuyu men to work on the neighbouring European farms whilst others migrated to the Rift Valley in search of work or land to cultivate.[7] Further, the introduction poll tax in 1910, which targeted all males aged 16 years, forced more Kikuyu males to seek wage employment.[8]

Throughout the colonial period wages paid to Africans were depressed based on the theory that Africans were 'target' workers who only worked to purchase a few desired items after which they absconded. To supplement the low wages, the families of the workers were left in the reserves where they produced food for their own subsistence

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[4] H.W.O. Okoth-Ogendo, Tenants *of the Crown* (Nairobi: ACTS Press, 1991), p.91.

[5] Bruce Berman, 'Structure and Process in the Bureaucratic States of Colonial Africa 'in *Development and Change,* 15, 2, (1984), p.196.

[6] Cora Presley, *Kikuyu Women, the Mau Mau Rebellion and Social Change in Kenya* (Boulder: Westview, 1981), p. 46.

[7] Sharon Stichter, *Migrant Labour in Kenya: Capitalism and African Response 1895-1975* (Essex: Longman, 1982), p.34.

[8] *Ibid.*, p.35.

as well as that of the workers.[9] Thus the pre-colonial economy became an appendage to the new economy of estate agriculture subsidizing its low wages. Squatters on the settler farms subsisted on food-stuffs grown on the allocated plots of land. Indeed before 1945 it did not matter whether wages from employment on agricultural estates and elsewhere could meet the cost of living, mainly because there was always a guaranteed revenue from commodity production that in most cases contributed sufficiently to cover the ever rising prices of consumer prices goods for most of the households.[10]

Given the low remuneration, various coercive mechanisms were employed to ensure a continued labour supply in the colony. First, persistent labour shortages compelled the state to involve the provincial administration in the recruitment of labour. On 23 October 1919 the colonial government issued a special labour circular, the infamous 'Northey Circulars' stating, in part:

> [a]ll government officials in charge of native areas must exercise every possible lawful influence to induce able-bodied male natives to go into the labour field, where farms are situated in the vicinity of a native area, women and children should be encouraged to go out for such labour, as they can perform.[11]

This resulted in an escalation of forceful recruitment. In retaliation the clergy in Britain reacted by issuing what was known as the 'Bishops Memorandum' that overtly condemned the use of force in the recruitment of labour. In 1920 the colonial office issued yet another circular stipulating that Africans working on their plots should not be pressured to go out and work while women and children should return to their homes daily after work.[12]

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[9] *Ibid.*, p.27.

[10] Michael Cowen, 'Commodity Production in Kenya's Central Province' in Judith Heyer, Roberts Pepe and Williams Gavin (eds.) *Rural Development in Tropical Africa* (London: Macmillan, 1981), p. 123.

[11] Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya and Africa Book One: State and Class* (London: James Currey, 1992), p.111.

[12] *Ibid.*

Second, workers were employed on a ticket system.[13] The ticket system ensured that workers were tied to one employer for a substantial period of time. Before a ticket was completed workers could not be paid or seek employment elsewhere. Wages were increased depending on the number of tickets that one completed. For example, in Ruiru division men received a Sh. 1 increment on the 4, 7 and 10th tickets, a Sh.2 increment on the 13th ticket and thereafter there was a Sh. 2 increment per year.[14] It was only after the 50th ticket that such workers could be employed on a calendar month basis. Similarly, women received a wage increment of Sh.1 on completion of the 5th and 9th tickets.[15] After the 13th ticket a Sh. 2 wage rise was obtained. That was one strategy of creating a stable work force although its dependability was a different matter altogether as we will note later in this chapter. Third, a native registration ordinance was passed in 1920. In accordance with the Ordinance all African men aged between 15 and 40 were compelled to carry a passbook or *kipande* which provided details on their current and previous employer (s), duration of employment, type of work and wages received.

In this chapter an attempt has been made to understand the plight of workers in commercial agriculture. The first section examines the working and living conditions in the late colonial period and the run up to independence. The changes and continuities in the post-colonial period are covered in the second section which also attempts a comparative analysis of the two epochs. The changes that were associated with the slump in the coffee industry and the introduction of economic reforms are assessed in the last section.

[13] In a ticket system a worker received a card for 30 days and wages were paid upon completion of the duration. If one worked every day except Sunday, one was paid within 5 weeks, if one missed work a number of day's wages were delayed correspondingly. Normally a 30-day ticket lasted between 30 and 45 days and in a year one completed an average of 7 to 8 tickets. In the 1970s this system was replaced with monthly contracts and employment was more permanent.

[14] KNA/ABK/12/102: Supply of Labour Coffee 1958.

[15] *Ibid.*

The Late Colonial Period, 1954-63

By 1946 Thika district was employing a labour force of thirty to forty thousand Africans.[16] Although some form of stability had been established changes wrought about by the political upheaval of the 1950s disrupted the supply of labour in the district. A state of Emergency was declared in October 1952 following the escalation of Mau Mau activities in the colony.

Accordingly, the colonial authorities imposed Emergency Regulations that banned the employment of the Kikuyu, Embu and Meru (KEM) for their alleged involvement in the Mau Mau. The resident KEM labour force were required to obtain a special pass (commonly referred to as the green card containing a photograph and the thumb prints of its holder) within 48 hours of engagement and 72 of discharge from the District Commissioner (DC) in order to move between the settled areas and the native reserves. The restriction on the movement of the KEM labour had far-reaching effects. Also, in 1953 a special tax of Sh. 20 was introduced initially to the Kikuyu and later was extended to the Embu and Meru.[17] Subsequently, there was a rapid rise in revenue collection in Thika during the Emergency period. In 1958, a total of £18,000 was collected in form of taxes. This amount was almost twofold that which had been collected in 1957. Out of this amount £14,000 was collected from Africans.[18] In essence the KEM tax was an extra burden on an already impoverished population.[19] The tax resulted in exploitation of KEM peasants, irrespective of whether they were actually Mau Mau supporters or not. This resembled what happened to Mau Mau sympathisers during the land adjudication processes discussed in chapter two.

The imposition of restrictions on the movement of the KEM created an artificial labour shortage that threatened productivity in the district. Subsequently, the ban on

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[16] KNA/CS/2/1/107: Thika District Association 1946.

[17] Bethwell Ogot (ed.), *Makhan Singh 1952-56 Crucial Years of Kenya Trade Unions* (Nairobi: Uzima, 1980), p.13.

[18] KNA/AMC/14/33: Thika District Monthly Intelligence Reports 1956-60.

[19] KNA/MAA/1/7: Unrest in Central Province, 1952.

the employment of the 'treacherous' KEM was not strictly followed by all planters. Barely one year after the imposition of Emergency Regulations, the Thika DC observed that there was a rapid increase in the number of KEM who were being recruited by planters in the area. The DC warned that such planters failed to realise 'the danger of increasing the population of the district with these tribes [sic]'.[20] Many KEM found their way into the district. A spot check in most estates brought out many of them some of whom did not possess the 'green cards' and defaulted on the payment of the special tax.[21]

In one such incident 220 arrests were made on one of the 250 estates in Thika district then. This was despite surveillance from the provincial administration and the British troops. In one impromptu swoop conducted by the British troops in Thika Township a total of 1,100 Africans were arrested. Of this 255 were categorised as hard core Mau Mau fighters.[22] One would then wonder why settlers would defy the directive of the DC. The planters retained the 'dangerous' KEM for their own interests. First, the Mau Mau movement had upset a tribal composition by introducing Akamba and Luo workers in the district. In the initial phases of the Mau Mau war, many farmers had their Kikuyu labourers either removed or constantly charged with intimidating non-KEM workers, particularly, the Luo and Luhya who subsequently deserted employment. On their desertion, the remaining labour force comprising mainly the Akamba seized the opportunity of the labour shortage in 1955 to demand a wage hike.[23] This is consistent with Stichter's observation that during periods of high and short supply, migrant workers pressed for higher wages.[24] Similarly, commenting on the labour crisis the Thika DC noted 'further trouble could be expected unless steps were taken to improve wage scales and other conditions of rural employment'.[25] In

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[20] KNA/PC/NZA/4/4/57: Central Province Annual Report 1953.

[21] KNA/VQ/16/4: Thika District Annual Report 1949-1958.

[22] *The Times*, 27 July, 1954.

[23] *Ibid.*

[24] Stichter, *Migrant Labour in Kenya*, p.107.

[25] KNA/VQ/16/98: Thika District Annual Report 1955.

1955 the employment conditions in the district were most unfavourable and not comparable to those found in other parts of the colony.[26] Yet, the planters were not willing to review wages or improve the living conditions for the workers in the wake of a slump in the coffee industry and a looming political uncertainty in the colony.

Second, many planters dismissed the non-KEM as being of an 'inferior and low quality, unstable…the employer tends to surround himself with far too many itinerant workers, to whom is paid an uneconomic wage for an uneconomic output.'[27] Conversely, the KEM were preferred for their skills in coffee picking and pruning. The coffee planters described the KEM as an 'intelligent and stable labour force'.[28] Third, recruitment of labour from the far-flung provinces was not economically viable 'partly due to the expenses involved in recruiting from Nyanza and other distant places especially as the labour tends to stay only for a short period'.[29] It became apparent that most of the workers who were recruited from Nyanza were mainly interested in getting to Thika or Kiambu which were considered as a springboard to Nairobi and Kahawa which offered better prospects.

The problem of labour shortage was accentuated by a bumper coffee harvest in 1956 and yet efforts made in 1955 to have the Nyanza 'tribes' return to the Thika had proved unsuccessful.[30] Faced with a severe shortage of labour planters resorted to recruiting their workers from Fort Hall district while others sought authority from the DC security team, in charge of Emergency Regulations, to recruit the KEM. Kiaora Estate was among the estates that recruited the KEM although they were subjected to vetting before being allowed to pick coffee in the estate. [31] As a consequence it became more and more noticeable that the percentage of Kikuyu in the district's

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[26] *Ibid.*

[27] *Ibid.*

[28] KNA/VQ/16/4: Thika District Annual Report 1949-1958.

[29] *Ibid.*

[30] KNA/VQ/16/98: Thika District Annual Report 1955.

[31] KNA/VQ/16/4: Thika District Annual Report 1949-1958.

labour force was rising steadily in the late 1950s.[32] Finally, in 1957 restrictions on the employment of the KEM were relaxed. They were then permitted to work during the day on their land units or travel to seek employment in the urban areas.

Labour shortage notwithstanding most planters took advantage of the state of Emergency to exploit the KEM labour force. For instance, the KEM labourers were 'taken for screening…detained…lost their employment as well as wages for the part of the month worked'.[33] Some planters took advantage of the labour crisis and failed to pay workers who had not completed the required tickets on the pretext that they did not intend to renew their contracts or extend their tickets. Such injustices were common and yet the KEM were expected to pay extra taxes besides fending for their families on their meagre earnings.

Another form of privation brought by the Emergency was the constraint placed on women labourers who were expected to supply labour in both the commercial and subsistence sectors simultaneously. Women workers were paid a maximum of Sh. 24 plus rations per ticket a matter which will be addressed shortly.[34] This wage would be earned only if a woman worked for six days a week for four weeks which was highly unlikely because most women had family commitments. Moreover, the high demand for the women's labour during the coffee harvest period coincided with the harvest of women's subsistence crops. This created a conflict between wage labour and subsistence production. It followed that most planters and government officials were of the opinion that women labourers were unwilling to work (all through the colonial period). Apparently, the settlers and officials could not understand that working for wages had a negative effect on food supply in rural households. Further, involvement of women in capitalist production had negative impact on their families, whom they were expected to nurture and take care of.

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[32] *Ibid.*

[33] KNA/ABK/12/49: Contracts of Employment Frustration of Labour 1954-55.

[34] KNA/ABK/12/45: Employment of African Women in Agriculture-Wages and Hours of Work.

Furthermore, wages paid to women were particularly important in the female-headed households which comprised the majority. Wages paid to women averaged Sh. 24 in the mid-1950s and were expected to cover all household expenditure given that the males were in detention, in the forest or unemployed following the Emergency Regulations. In most households the wages proved insufficient to cover all the living costs as well as support their kin in the adjacent reserves. Evidence obtained from the annual reports of this period attest to the fact that many workers borrowed money from employers barely two weeks after payday.[35] The routine was to borrow immediately after payday, creating some form of dependency since indebtedness kept workers trapped to certain employers even though they were harsh and cruel to them.

Overall, the low level of remuneration made most Kikuyu labourers unwilling to take their families to the plantations because the rations that were provided were for bare subsistence. In most cases, rations consisted of some *posho* (corn meal) and beans, and sugar in very small proportions.[36] An examination of Mitubiri farm, Makuyu bears. In 1958 Mitubiri Farm paid all wages and a ration of Sh. 30 per head, a free house of 13 by 13 metres, a kitchen, store and latrine. In 1958 each female labourer was allowed two acres of land to grow food, free medical treatment for her family and emoluments for water and firewood.[37] Rations were intended to supplement the meagre wages paid to workers and were supplied on a weekly basis, although this was left to the discretion of planters given that there did not exist a policy on rations.[38] Consequently, the quality of the *posho* was of questionable nutritional value for the labour force.[39] Further, meat that was supplied by the Kenya Meat Commission (KMC) for feeding the labour force in Makuyu division was unfortunately of not only lower 'grade' in terms of quality but frequent shortages were reported.[40] In the

[35] KNA/AMC/14/12: Thika District Annual Report 1955-61.

[36] Personal Communication, Wahu Mutungi, Kamwangi, 23 April 2002.

[37] KNA/ABK/12/102: Supply of Labour Coffee 1958.

[38] KNA/ABK/12/45: Employment of African Women in Agriculture-Wages and Hours of Work.

[39] KNA/Thika District Labour Quarterly Reports 1954-57.

[40] KNA/VQ/16/98: Thika District Annual Report 1955.

absence of a strong labour union in the pre-1960 period, the workers remained vulnerable to the conditions set by the planters.

Closely linked to low wages were the coffee picking rates. Annual picking rates were decided during a meeting between the district associations (planters) and the headmen, who represented the coffee-pickers. The meeting was scheduled to take place in July at the Ruiru Club, located in the heartland of the coffee estates. The picking rate was pegged to the price realised from the preceding year's coffee crop. The general rule was that for the first £50 a ton received, the picking rate would be 15 cents a *debe* (Kiswahili for a 20-litre tin) and for every extra £50 a ton the picking rate rose by 5 cents. This was referred to as the 'sliding scale formula', which insulated planters from potential losses resulting from vagaries of weather or fluctuations in the world market. For instance, in 1955/56 picking rates stagnated at 55 cents per *debe* the same rate paid the previous year.[41] Again, in 1959 the picking rate was fixed at 60 cents which was five cents lower than that of 1958.[42] This was unexpected given the favourable coffee price in that year. By and large the sliding scale formula left no room for bargaining as the rates were predetermined by the planters without giving the headmen, a voice in the deliberations. The economic imperative that drove the colonial economy remains quite explicit in all the arrangements regarding labour.

Besides fiscal oppression, workers were subjected to deplorable living conditions. Since the inception of colonialism resident labour housing was never accorded serious attention. In most of the estates the structures consisted of rondavels built of mud, sticks and maize stalk.[43] There was minimal improvement in the housing during much of the colonial period. This was in spite of efforts by the Labour Department to beseech planters to put up modern and hygienic houses for their labour force. The limited success in the provision of better housing was traced to several factors. First, only a few estates took cognisance of the importance of maintaining proper houses for

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[41] KNA/Labour Quarterly Report 1954-57.

[42] KNA/ABK/12/101: Supply of Labour Coffee 1959.

[43] See Elspeth Huxley, *The Flame Trees of Thika: Memories of an African Childhood* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1959).

their workers. Second, and more importantly, most planters who had embarked on building programmes became wary of spending a considerable amount of money on permanent houses only to have them disapproved of by the colonial authorities on the basis of being 'unsuitable from a security or tactical point of view'.[44] According to the Emergency Regulations houses were supposed to be built in enclosures for security reasons.[45] In the initial rush to concentrate the structures in more easily monitored enclosures, quality and design were overlooked.

To ensure that the county and health regulations were adhered to by the estate owners, the NCC pressed them as much as possible. By the end of the 1950s, J. McClellan, the Resident Labour Inspector, reported that most of the large plantations had good labour lines (workers' quarters) with latrines and an available water supply. In relative terms the squatters' camps in the district were generally of a higher standard than those he had seen in other areas.[46] The first initiative towards improved housing involved the refurbishment of rondavels. The floors were cemented and better ventilation was provided. This followed the realisation by planters of the significance of having a permanent resident labour force based on family units preferably chosen from among the people in the reserves.[47] The Oaklands, Mchana, Anglo-French Estates and the East Africa Bag and Cordage (EABC) in Ruiru were among the first estates and firms to take lead in the provision of better houses for the workers. Also, in this category of planters who provided workers with decent housing were Messrs. Socfinaf Company and Juja Properties both in Ruiru division. In the Makuyu division, the Mitubiri Farm had exemplary good housing comprising rooms of 13 by 13 metres, a kitchen, store and latrine.

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[44] KNA/LAB:Labour Quarterly Reports 1954-57.

[45] Antony Clayton and Donald Savage, *Government and Labour in Kenya 1895-1963* (London: Frank Cass, 1974), p.357.

[46] The Kiaora Estate in Ruiru was infamous for dilapidated and unkempt structures throughout the colonial period.

[46] KNA/AF/1/6: Thika District Resident Labourers Inspection Report 1955-1961.

[47] KNA/TKA/3/26: General Correspondence 1958.

Improvements in housing seemed to be the exception rather than the rule since many 'cash-trapped' planters claimed that falling profits and fluctuations in coffee prices prevented them from committing resources to renovate or construct new labour lines. In estates where renovations were carried out planters often complained that the costs were too high. The appalling state of housing was captured in the Thika District Labour Officer report which stated that:

> [t]he standard of housing offered by the larger employers is satisfactory, particularly in the sisal industry but in all these schemes the lay out of housing plantations has shown a complete lack of imagination. The houses are invariably placed in lines similar to hen houses on a poultry farm…. no use being made of the space or natural features at the disposal of the employer, in fact no effort has been made to give the impression of a housing plantation or village…interest in the layout of housing will gradually be roused.[48]

Similar remarks could be passed for most of the available houses in the district at the time. Although lack of creativity in the design may have been undermined by the security requirements, the fact that planters were reluctant to spend money on better housing paints a bad image of the estate owners. The cases of Megji & Kanji and Kiaora Estates are illustrative. The former laid no water in the houses and more than 20 workers were expected to share one toilet. Floors were laid-on stones and the drainage was poor making the place a breeding ground for mosquitoes.[49] Similarly, in the late 1950s the District Resident Labour Officer reported that workers' houses at Kiaora Estate were in 'a filthy condition and nobody made the slightest attempt to keep them clean or in good repair'.[50] The poor hygienic conditions and lack of drinking water increased the workers' susceptibility to most of the health-related illnesses discussed in chapter seven. Whilst water to irrigate the coffee fields was readily available, workers had to draw water from shallow wells or were exposed to the hazard of using polluted water which after analysis by the public health department was declared unfit for human consumption and a common cause of waterborne diseases.[51]

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[48] *Ibid.*

[49] KNA/VK/1/57: Thika and Kiambu Senior Labour Inspectors' Reports 1961-62.

[50] KNA/AF/1/6: Thika District Resident Labourers Inspection Report 1955-1961.

[51] KNA/VQ/16/98: Thika District Annual Report 1955.

Without necessarily blaming the planters for the appalling housing conditions, the officials in the Resident Labour Inspectorate were of the opinion that 'squatters did not encourage employers to provide good housing and lots [sic] seem happier living in squalor in the close proximity of their cattle shed than in decent houses'.[52] Seemingly, migrant workers introduced the age-old custom of sharing their huts with animals in the settled areas. This practice could be traceable to the low wages paid to workers who then diversified their sources of income by keeping chickens and goats for their own subsistence or for commercial purposes.

The absence of adequate recreational and social amenities was another form of deprivation experienced by plantation workers during the colonial period. It was only in the 1940s that the idea of establishing authorised beer houses, which would also serve as recreational centres was mooted by the large coffee planters in Thika district.[53] However, this came to fruition after the 1956 coffee boom. The Ndarugu Group comprising planters from the Ruiru division visited the Ndundori area in the Rift Valley where they borrowed the idea of building provision stores, dispensaries, beer-halls and tea shops on their own estates.[54] After the visit Karakuta Estate, a member of the Ndarugu Group erected an architect-designed social hall, the first of its kind in the district. Apart from the social hall there was a shop and changing rooms with showers. In the entertainment hall workers relaxed as they enjoyed a mug of beer. In the hall workers listened to music from a gramophone or news from the Wireless and Cable Ltd, the main source of broadcasting in the colony, for African listeners.[55] This recreational facility was accessible to workers from neighbouring estates at a monthly fee of 50 cents per person.[56] The payment of a fee blocked some workers who could not raise it.

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[52] KNA/AF/1/6: Thika District Resident Labourers Inspection Report 1955-1961.

[53] KNA/VQ/16/23: Thika District Intelligence Reports 1939-40.

[54] Clayton, *Government and Labour in Kenya*, p. 310.

[55] KNA/VQ/16/4: Thika District Monthly Reports 1949-1958.

[56] KNA/AMC/14/12: Thika District Annual Reports 1955-61.

Another reputable form of entertainment was provided by the African Broadcasting Service (ABS). The ABS entertainment unit organised a mobile cinema van which moved around the district, particularly in the estates in Ruiru division.[57] The ABS was the main source of information for the workers, especially because it aired news on the Mau Mau movement. Propaganda was widely spread to denigrate the Mau Mau using the same channel. However, the declaration of the state of Emergency disrupted functions of the service.

Playing sports was yet another popular way of spending leisure time for the estate workers. The district sports day organised by the respective District Officers (DOs) with the assistance of the Community Development Assistants (CDAs) was the peak of the district sport activities and an event that many men 'looked forward to with anxiety'.[58] Unfortunately, the event received minimal support from most planters who out rightly were reluctant to provide recreational facilities for their labour force.[59] From the foregoing it is apparent that the welfare of the workers did not rank high in the agenda of the planters in the district.

In the absence of organised ways of entertainment workers devised their alternative or parallel ways of spending their spare time. This took the form of brewing and consuming of *pombe* (Kiswahili for liquor) which was outlawed, particularly in the settled areas. Still, the consumption of illegal liquor was pervasive on the estates. In one interesting incident in the Ol Donyo Sabuk area, workers went on strike alleging that 'police were being too zealous in checking *pombe* offences'.[60] Similar cases were reported in Kiaora, Murera and Theta Estates in Ruiru where an escalation of violent crime was attributed to abuse of alcohol.[61] It would appear that the production and consumption of illegal alcohol evolved as a way of offsetting depression caused by the chronic poverty and despair that characterised life on the estates. Indeed

[57] Kenya Colony and Protectorate, *Colonial Reports 1952* (Her Majesty's Stationery Office 1953), p.122.

[58] KNA/AF/4/9: Information Circulars 1956.

[59] *Ibid.*

[60] KNA/VQ/16/4: Thika District Annual Report 1949-1958.

[61] *Ibid.*

alcoholism was more prominent in estates that made little provision for the welfare of the workers.

Since the estates were private property, the provision of education for the workers' children remained the responsibility of estate owners. Although official records suggest that the settled areas had far better schools than the reserves, this generalisation cannot be made for all the divisions in Thika. The provision of educational facilities was dependent on the willingness of estate owners to provide incentives to their labour force. For example, in the mid-1950s, six prominent growers (sisal and coffee) in Makuyu division raised £5,000 which was used to put up money an intermediate school in their area.[62] In a similar arrangement planters and workers topped up a grant from the African Trust Fund and built the Ruiru Intermediate School at a cost of £2,150.[63] By the end of the 1950s, there were 39 primary and three intermediate schools in the reserves and an additional intermediate school in the town of Thika.[64] In relative terms Thika cannot be said to have lagged behind in as far as provision of educational facilities were concerned.

Before 1956 there existed no provident or pension fund for African workers. The Labour Department pressed private employers to secure a pension or provident fund for their workers. This bore fruit as by the end of the 1950s it had become a prerequisite for all employers to provide some form of pension to cushion their prospective employees. To start with most employers allowed employees who were too old to work to remain on the plantations where they enjoyed free housing, a small garden to grow vegetables, rations, and a small monthly cash wage of between Sh. 10 and 40 depending on how long they had served. [65] This form of pension offered some security in old age, particularly for the landless workers who did not have a place to

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[62] KNA/AMC/14/2: Thika District Annual Report 1955-60.

[63] *Ibid.*

[64] KNA/AMC/4/34: Central Province Annual Report 1956.

[65] KNA/AF/1/1: Thika District Annual Reports 1953-1960.

return to after their retirement.[66] In the 1960s and beyond ex-workers were allowed to live on farms after their service.[67]

Given the aforementioned working and living conditions, it is imperative to highlight the development of trade unionism in the district. The first trade union regulation in the colony was the enactment of Ordinance No. 35 of 1939 which required all crafts organisations to apply for registration which they could be granted or denied depending on whether their dealings were consistent with government policy. This suggests a close control of the labour union by the state. Trade unionism belatedly spread to the agriculture sector in the late 1950s. Among the first agricultural labour unions to be formed were: the 'Sisal and Coffee Plantation Workers Union' in 1959, the 'Tea Plantation Workers Union and the General Agricultural Worker's Union, and the Kenya Union of Sugar Plantation Worker's in 1960. The latter two were merged in 1963 to form the Kenya Plantation and Agricultural Workers Union (KPAWU). Initially the unions faced serious leadership wrangles. For example, between 1963 and 1968, none of the secretary-generals of the Kenya Federation of Labour (KFL) remained in office for longer than two years. [68] In time the labour movement became stable and proved to be a power to reckon with in the colony.

The first labour unions were formed on the plantations near Nairobi, including Thika where after 1959 unionism spread like bushfire. The existence of estates (sisal and coffee) and the industries acted as a catalyst to this. Appalling working and living conditions in Nairobi pushed workers to join unions which they viewed as avenues through which they would advance their own cause. Strikes and protests in Nairobi often spread to the neighbouring agricultural estates. Trade unions were spontaneous and worker-driven but they became an integral part of the nationalistic wave sweeping across the colony at that time, as the case of Thika demonstrates.

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[66] KNA/VK/1/54 Thika and Kiambu Districts Monthly Reports of Senior Labour Inspector 1961-1962.

[67] Clayton, *Government and Labour*, p.406.

[68] Kerstin Leitner, 'The Situation of Agricultural Workers in Kenya', *Review of African Political Economy*, 6, (1976), p. 43.

From the 1960s Thika became a hotbed of labour unionism in the colony. The incidence of strikes was so high that in 1960 alone there were 232 work stoppages of which 122 occurred in the agricultural sector, mainly on the coffee plantations in Central Province.[69] In 1960, 53 strikes occurred in Thika district while not a single strike was reported in the neighbouring Kiambu district.[70] Strikes which took place in the same year included one in Kenya Canners and EABC. Unsurprisingly, strikes were contagious and spread between the agriculture and industrial sectors and sometimes between the estates. In estates which were involved in both coffee and sisal farming such as Kiaora Estate, risk of strikes was high since often both coffee and sisal workers went on strike simultaneously. This explains the high number of strikes recorded in Thika in this period. But it also underscores the fact that the living conditions of workers, particularly in the sisal, estates were appalling.

Another common cause of strikes among workers was verbal abuse and physical harassment by headmen in the various estates.[71]A few examples of cases where strikes occurred are provided below to illustrate this point. In 1960 there was a strike at Katimai Estate, where more than 100 workers downed their tools and demanded the instant dismissal of a headman for his alleged brutality to them. The strikers demanded an audience with the estate owner and ignored pleas by the estate manager to return to work. The strike lasted two weeks during which negotiations reached a deadlock and 'all workers elected to be discharged, rather than to continue to work under the headman'.[72] The determination of the workers demonstrates the extent to which workers were ready to sacrifice their jobs in return for their dignity. As an expression of solidarity the labour unions provided the affected workers with food

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[69] KNA/Central Province Annual Report 1960, p.15.

[70] Nicholas Hyde, 'Plantation Struggles in Kenya: Trade Unionism on the Land 1947-1963' (Ph.D. Thesis, University of London, 2000).

[71] Headmen were African supervisors or foremen appointed by planters in liaison with local chiefs to oversee operations in the estates. They were to oversee work and be the watchdogs of coffee planters and representatives of the workers. For increased efficiency supervisors were trained on how to ensure that the tasks were carried out as expected while also retaining good work relations on the estates, they were expected to act as an intermediary between the management and the workers.

[72] KNA/ABK/8/226: Labour Department Katimai Estate Limited 1960-61.

supplies during the period of strike when planters failed to provide rations. Cumulatively, the protracted period of strikes in the district caused the various unions financial difficulties.[73]

The way workers were treated varied from one estate to another. The Labour Department was well aware of this and handled every strike differently. During periods of strike the estates which accorded workers fair treatment received prompt response from the Department. For instance, on 4th April 1960, 650 workers of G. Criticos & Company [Kiaora] at Ruiru went on strike demanding 'more pay, better rations, a bonus and the discharge of a clerk and a European in a supervisory capacity'.[74] But upon notification of the strike the Labour Officer dismissed it thus: 'I do not view the situation here as particularly significant…it is a Greek-owned concern where conditions are not particularly good'.[75] This contrasts with the following remark passed about Ruera Estate which was reported by the same labour office as having 'a very enlightened attitude towards its employees, and has given the Coffee Plantation Workers' Union every facility to meet the workers and hold meetings on their estates over the last two months'.[76] From the foregoing it is not an exaggeration to observe that the working conditions were despicable and a time bomb. The general condition in the colony in the 1950s was explosive and the appalling living conditions easily pushed the workers to join the Mau Mau rebellion. The workers consciousness had been raised by the nascent labour movement. The Mau Mau rebellion was the culmination of the pressure bubbling below surface in the last few decades of the colonial era. Table 5.1 shows a trend of rising strikes and a growing unrest in the period between 1954 and 1960.

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[73] KNA/ABK/8/227: Strike EABC Ltd. Ruiru 1960.

[74] KNA/ABK/8/225: Strike G.Criticos & Company Ltd.

[75] The Senior Labour Officer wrote on 5th May 1960. This was supposed to be a serious strike situation to warrant attention as it involved 1,400 workers in Hermes Plantation Limited and Mang'u Estate.

[76] KNA/VQ/16/98: Thika District Annual Report 1955.

Table 5.1 Work Stoppages in Kiambu and Thika Districts 1954-1960[77]

Year	Work Stoppages	Workers involved	Work days lost
1954	33	1,518	2,026
1955	35	17,852	81,870
1956	38	5,170	28,238
1957	77	21,954	25,391
1958	96	21,395	59,096
1959	67	42,214	431,973
1960	237	72,545	57,860

The table shows that during between 1952 and 1956 when the Mau Mau war was at its peak, the number of strikes dropped because of the enforcement of Emergency Regulations. After 1956 when the regulations were relaxed the number of strikes rose again. The incessant protests and upheavals coincided with the onset of independence.

The Early Post-Colonial Period 1964-1980

After 1963 most of the plantations were transferred to the black elite.[78] As already noted in the previous chapter the chief beneficiaries of the large-scale farm transfers were members of the Kenyatta family and senior civil servants.[79] Also, estates were transferred to companies or groups who collectively purchased them from departing white farmers.[80] The labour structures that were put in place during the colonial period remained largely unchanged. The plantation workers attested to the fact that they had not witnessed any remarkable changes in labour relations between the colonial and post-colonial periods. For the workers it was merely a change of guard.

[77] Presley, ‘Labour Unrest’, p. 273.

[78] Colin Leys, *Underdevelopment in Kenya: The Political Economy of Neo-Colonialism* (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1975), p.255.

[79] The farms include; Gatheca, Kiriti, Muiri, Muthati, Machure, Socfinaf, Benvar, Bob Harries, Gatheca, Kakuzi, Karakuta, Karangi, Kuraiha, Murera, Mutoma, Nyakinyua and Ruera.

[80] The Nyakinyua Investment Limited comprised 5,000 women who bought Murera Coffee Plantations from the Norwegian owners in 1977.

In the remainder of this chapter we focus on the dynamics of labour relations in independent Kenya.

On the threshold of independence, both employers and trade unions realised that it was vital for the nation to make economic progress. The need for capital and labour to work together in harmony was underscored, as well as urgency in curtailing the incidence of strikes and lock-outs. The vibrant unionism associated with the strikes and industrial disputes in the 1960s was gradually 'trimmed' by the post-colonial state. From 1964 onwards, the Kenyan government began to take explicit steps to consolidate the strength of various groups of employers. The Central Organisation of Trade Unions (COTU), which was formed in 1966 as the umbrella of all trade unions in the country, was soon co-opted by the government. From then, labour unionism in Kenya has been plagued by political meddling. Since then the state has continued to define the scope of union economic action, decrees its structure and specifies the general content of the union's constitutional rules, including the qualifications for candidates for top union office and requires submission of periodic reports on finances and the election of office-holders.[81] Gradually but decisively trade unions lost their autonomy and ability to call strikes and the militancy of the 1950s ebbed. As the unions lost their clout, 'starvation' wages, poor housing conditions and lack of basic infrastructure became commonplace in the commercial agricultural sector and are barely resisted.

Most of the agricultural workers were unionised and their wages were fixed by collective agreement reached between the employers and the respective trade union. The employers were expected to follow wage guidelines that were premised on the changes in the economy as well as levels of productivity in their respective enterprises. Above all, wages were expected to be reflective of the cost of living. At the policy level, the arrangement was quite ideal to workers but at the implementation level the reality was different. First, with the unions having lost their bargaining power, for much of the post-colonial period wages have been depressed way below the living costs. Second, soaring unemployment has compelled the government to

[81] Richard Sandbrook, *Proletarians and African Capitalism: The Kenyan Case, 1962-70* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 47.

impose stringent control measures on employment. In 1969 there was an agreement between the employers and the unions to employ at least 10 percent of their labour force.

Subsequently, the wages that were awarded following the 1950s protests remained unchanged until the late 1960s, when agricultural workers were awarded a slight wage increment of between Sh. 68 and 71 in 1967 and 1968 respectively.[82] The justification given by the government and the compromised union being there was reportedly a rate of inflation which could not warrant a wage increment. The consumer prices remained generally stable in the late 1960s while in fact the price of maize meal dropped. The workers derived substantial benefit from the low prices.[83]

However, the wage rates of the 1960s proved inadequate in the wake of the economic challenges that Kenyans experienced in the 1970s. Following the oil-induced recession of the early 1970s Kenya's economy began to falter. Shortage of money, both foreign and local, consequent shortages of raw materials for industry and large increases in consumer prices became rampant. There was a noteworthy wage differential between the estate and the smallholdings as there were intra-estate variations. The KCGA always showed an inclination to use the incapacity of some farmers to pay reasonable wages as a justification for keeping wages low in the whole industry. For instance, in 1973 when there was an upsurge in the demand for labour during the coffee picking season, the KCGA raised coffee picking rates by 17 percent but farmers rejected the new picking rates, threatening to abandon coffee for cattle farming.[84] This forced the KCGA to rescind the decision, exempting small-scale farmers from reviewing wages upwards. Such discrimination continued to depress wages in the 1970s and beyond.[85] In 1979 earnings rarely exceeded Sh.1, 500 per

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[82] RoK, *Economic Survey 1969* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1969), p. 169.

[83] *Ibid.*

[84] Leitner, 'The Situation of Agricultural Workers in Kenya', p.38.

[85] *Ibid.*

month which is meagre to cater for basic household needs.[86] Families had to cut down their expenditure clothing, consumables and at times education (see chapter four and six).

Labour in Crisis, 1980-2000

Every coffee plantation had a number of houses to which permanent workers and those with families were given first priority. Casual workers were only accommodated if there were extra houses. If a worker was not housed, transport to and from work was provided. As already noted in the previous section, houses that were constructed in the 1920s were still in use in most plantations in the 1980s. The labour lines were in disrepair and posed serious health hazards to the workers. Although a few estates maintained decent labour lines which were built in the last three decades this was the exception rather than the rule.

Therefore finding workers living in rough and grass-thatched units built in the colonial era was not surprising. These old structures with un-cemented floors and dilapidated walls were prone to jiggers,[87] cockroaches, and rats. In most of the camps workers have to share some facilities such as latrines, bathrooms and kitchens. In some plantations toilets are so dilapidated that workers preferred to use the bush. Squalid conditions are more common in estates that were owned by individuals than to those owned by companies or co-operative societies. Estates that were in the hands of Socfinaf were properly maintained in the colonial days but following years of disrepair the labour lines are an eyesore as those on any other estate.

In a few estates workers are expected to draw water from the dams or reservoirs for their domestic use yet this water is meant for irrigation. In fewer estates workers are provided with piped water, which is not supplied in the houses but has to be drawn from designated central water points. On average workers spend between five and ten

[86] RoK, *Kiambu District Development Plan 1979-83* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1980), p.10.

[87] Jiggers or *tunga penetrans* are parasites that burrow the soft parts of the skin, especially toes. See Huxley Elspeth, *The Flame Trees of Thika: Memories of an African Childhood* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1959), p.37.

minutes to get to these water points. The water is stored in jerricans, taking up space in the small houses. Neither the water from the dams nor the one from the pipes is treated yet many of the coffee factories drain their recirculation tanks into rivers and dams.[88] This poses serious health hazards to the workers as well neighbouring communities (see chapter seven). There was no electricity in most of the camps, in spite of the fact that all plantations operations were automated and the electrical lines passed over the houses of the workers. The management in the estates contended that it is not possible to supply workers with electricity because the costs are prohibitive.[89] Instead, workers use lanterns or firewood for their lighting as one *nyapara* (Kiswahili for supervisor) admitted.[90]

Space was quite limited in the estates' houses. Even the newly constructed houses are not spacious enough to accommodate the ordinarily large family sizes found on the estates. Often workers use sheets of cloth or some raffia to partition the single rooms thus creating spaces that are put to different uses and also to introduce some level of privacy.[91] Often the small rooms are poorly ventilated. This is compounded by smoke since cooking is carried out in the same room. Cracks in the walls and roofs are indicative of the extent of neglect and plight of the workers.

Given the nature of poverty of the plantation workers, there was little or scanty furniture in the houses, save the almost obvious small wooden table, cupboard and a few folding chairs. On average this kind of furniture was found in about a third of all the houses in a given estate. In a majority of the houses the traditional three-legged chair was the most common piece of furniture, probably because it was affordable or could easily be carved at no cost using the readily available material. The limited space accommodated only one bed for the parents. In most cases young children slept on the floor for lack of enough beds as well as space. Sometimes they had no mattress

[88] KNA/XA/11/41: Murang'a District Annual Report 1984.

[89] Personal Communication, Francis Munyua, Ruiru, 25 April 2002.

[90] Personal Communication, Mwangi Wamugo, Kakuzi, 23 April 2002.

[91]This is a kind of fibre that grows along riverbanks and it is malleable making it ideal for making partitions or interior design.

but they slept on makeshift beds and bedding made mainly from sacks. In rare circumstances, children had a threadbare blanket to cover themselves with. It was common to have the young children soil the beddings to the discomfort of the older siblings. The disturbing smell of dry urine was ubiquitous in the houses. The lack of privacy for the couples was tolerable but not without a price. Most children were exposed to sexual activities when still very young. The moral issues and early exposure to sex only complicated the precarious circumstances of life on the plantations.

In these appalling conditions lived the labour force that produced the beverage most cherished by many in the Western societies and also a major foreign exchange earner for the country. Loewensen's description of living conditions of commercial agricultural workers in Zimbabwe's might have been written about Thika:

> The smell of backed up toilets…odour of urine is everywhere. The water smells bad and sometimes is not potable. There is an absence of lighting, and in the isolated plantations where it is provided wiring is exposed, creating further hazards. Windows do not have screens. Pests, bugs and rats are a problem…these are homes congressmen from Washington would not keep their dogs in.[92]

Yet, to the majority of the workers who were interviewed, the kind of housing that was provided was satisfactory. Probably because they had no better homes besides the labour camps. Despite their squalid conditions, plantations continued to attract migrant labour even though they barely eked out a living. As had already been demonstrated in the previous chapters, to a majority of the informants life in the plantations was better than what most of them would experience outside the plantations. Therefore, plantation life offered a last resort to people who would otherwise be destitute. Most of the resident labourers came from areas of absolute want and therefore did not mind the appalling housing so long as it was available and at no cost. In addition, the guaranteed or relatively stable monthly income kept the workers on the estates.[93]

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[92] Quoted in Rene Loewenson, *Modern Plantation Agriculture: Corporate Wealth and Labour Squalor* (London: Zed Books, 1992), p.18.

[93] Personal Communication, Japheth Muliro, Monday Plantation, 23 April 2002.

The poor living conditions caused stress for the residents, some of whom resorted to anti-social behaviour. There was general lack of discipline among the young and the old alike. The high incidence of drunkenness amongst adults and rowdy youths, women with multiple partners, high incidence of rape and teenage pregnancy was characteristic of plantation life. To most of the people who were living in the labour camps or *kampi* this was an acceptable normal life which they attributed to lack of a choice.[94] Several explanations were posed for the various types of social behaviour evident in the estate, some of which put the workers and their children at the risk of contracting the dreaded HIV/AIDS (see chapter seven).

As was mentioned earlier in this chapter both casual and permanent labourers were employed on the estates. Most of the workers who were interviewed on the plantations or outside but who had previously worked in the estates expressed disappointment at the terms of employment. Permanent employees had a written contract. The majority of the casual workers were employed by a verbal agreement for more than six months on one estate. This was in contravention of the Employment Act of 1976 (Cap 226 of the Laws of Kenya), which stipulates that:

> Every contract of service for a period of a number of working days which amount in the aggregate to the equivalent of six months or more or which provides for the performance of any specific work which could reasonably be expected to be completed within a period or a number of working days amounting to six months, shall be in writing.[95]

Casual workers lived in fear of termination of such verbal contracts which capricious *nyapara* (Kiswahili for supervisor) and estate managers commonly extended at will. Such an eventuality would mean that their families would starve and be evicted from the labour lines. Lack of alternative employment coerced workers to continue living on the estates even when conditions were not satisfactory. Many of the workers underscored the role of nepotism in the recruitment of labour.[96]

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[94] Personal Communication, Hannah Njoki Kamwangi, 23 April 2002.

[95] RoK, Laws of Kenya Cap 226 commencing in May 1976.

[96] Personal Communication, Hannah Wanjiru, Gatundu, 5 January 2002.

Lack of transparency and labour retention bred sexual harassment which was pervasive in most of the plantations. Women aged between 14-35 years were the main victims of harassment from supervisors who were predominantly male. For women to be retained on the payroll they had to extend sexual favours to their superiors. Ann who was aged 28 years has been living in plantation since 1995 when her brothers forced her out of her natal home. Ann was a single mother with three children, aged between 14 and 3 years.[97] She had lived in the estate and her daughter worked with her there. She was working around the factory. The work in the factory involved drying the coffee beans and sorting coffee into the various grades. There was competition for tasks around the factory which were lighter than those in the coffee fields. 'Factory work' was a preserve for those who received favours from supervisors.[98] The threat of losing a source of income compelled women to give in to sexual demands made by supervisors.[99] Her youngest daughter was born out of a casual relationship with the *nyapara.* She was subjected to sexual harassment like most of the women on the estate. A high percentage of all women who had suffered workplace sexual abuse were afraid to report the problem, for fear of losing their jobs no matter the wage rates.[100]

Uniform wages were paid to both permanent and casual labourers, although the latter were paid only for days actually worked. Absenteeism, for whatever reason, meant no money for that period. Frequent absenteeism could result in dismissal after a short warning or no notice at all, particularly for the casual labourers. Permanent workers were given two to three months notice before termination. If a permanent worker failed to accomplish the daily task [s]he was only paid for the work done but not for the whole day. Seasonal workers were among the poorest and most vulnerable on the plantations. They worked for a meagre wage, no benefits and did not enjoy job security. They were not entitled to maternity leave, sick pay or even annual leave.

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[97] Personal Communication, Pauline Wanjiku, Gatundu, 3 May 2002.

[98] Regina Karega, 'Assessment of Workplace Sexual Harassment in the Commercial Agriculture and Textile Manufacturing Sectors in Kenya' (International Human Rights Fund, May 2002), pp. 17, 19.

[99] *Ibid*.

[100] *Ibid.*

To circumvent paying of compensation or service benefits to workers, over the years planters devised a mechanism of maintaining high levels of casual labour. The economic recession of the 1990s pushed more planters into employing casual labourers who could be easily laid off without significant labour implications or obligations on their part. Due to the seasonal nature of activities on coffee farms casual labour constituted over 50 percent of the total labour force employed in the coffee plantations in 1993. [101]

Since the coffee boom of the mid-1970s, plantation workers have not been awarded any meaningful wage increment to cover all their living costs or to cope up with inflation. Between 1977 and 1980 the minimum wage earnings for the agricultural worker was Sh.215.[102] The wage proved inadequate to cover the cost of food stuffs, transport and other essentials such as clothing and footwear whose cost had climbed dramatically due to continuing inflation. In December 1981 the rate of inflation increased sharply to an annual rate of nearly 20 percent.[103] The attendant result was an increase in food prices which most people in the district complained about, including the agricultural workers, who constitute the least paid of all categories of workers.[104] Poor foreign exchange earnings stemming from the depressed demand for Kenya's major primary exports coupled with the high cost of more expensive imports caused serious external financing problems.[105] The price of Kenya coffee remained low and faced with a budgetary deficit it was difficult for the government to award a wage increment.[106] Although Kenya was facing serious economic hardships and the price of coffee was on a downward spiral, the government cannot be exonerated from having failed to protect the poor workers. It is due to the disjuncture between such

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[101] KNA/AMC/14/15: Thika Division Annual Report 1993.

[102] RoK, *Economic Survey 1982* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1982), p.3.

[103] *Ibid.*

[104] KNA/AMC/15/15: Thika Division Monthly Reports Other Departments 1981 and KNA/AMC/14/20: Thika Division Monthly Reports Other Departments 1982.

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[105] RoK, *Economic Survey 1982* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1982), p.3.

[106] *Ibid.*

meagre income and economic reality that workers have continued to wallow in abject poverty. The cumulative effect of low wages has made poverty inescapable in the district.[107]

It is not an exaggeration to state that plantation workers have continued to bear the brunt of the coffee glut. Sometimes wages are paid in intervals of between three and six months.[108] In the absence of regular monthly income, workers' families experienced serious conditions of deprivation and impoverishment. Some workers were forced to migrate to plantations that appear to be financially sound and therefore workers are paid promptly. In such circumstances, workers were served with short notice, and in certain cases their property was removed from the worker's house while [s] he was away.[109] However the managers of the plantations would not confirm this. In support of their own systems, they stated that they were flexible enough to allow ex-workers to stay in houses on their estates even when it was apparent that they were working elsewhere. Another major feature of plantation life is that of keeping livestock in the estates and growing maize practices which in the 1980s were not tolerated by the owners of the estates.[110] Different forms of survival strategies adopted by those living and working on the estates are elaborated upon in chapter eight.

Although the use of pesticides and chemicals to control the coffee berry disease and leaf rust has been on a decline in recent years, the little amounts that were used exposed workers to health risks.[111] In the 1990s Kenya was one of the many countries in the world, using high levels of pesticides, some of which had been banned by the

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[107] Ministry of Finance and Planning (MoF&P), *Thika District Development Plan 2002-2008* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 2002), pp.20, 21.

[108] Personal Communication, Francis Munyua, Ruiru, 25 April 2002.

[109] Personal Communication, Elizabeth Njoki, Kamwangi, 23 April 2002.

[110] Adagala Kavetsa, 'Households and Historical Change on Plantations in Kenya' in Eleonora Masini and Susan Stratigos (eds.) *Women, Households and Change* (Tokyo: UNUP Press, 1991), p.3.

[111] RoK, Thika District Department of Agriculture Annual Report 2000.

WHO.[112] In most cases the sprayers were not trained in chemical and pesticide usage. Women were particularly vulnerable since they were expected to pick coffee in recently sprayed coffee fields. In most estates workers were not provided with protective clothing. Most farm equipment was in a poor condition causing leaking thus exposing workers to risks. Both sprayers and harvesters complained of dizziness, eye and skin irritation, breathing difficulties, stomach problems and nausea. These ailments were more pervasive in periods when pesticides were in use than in other seasons. While a majority of the workers were aware of the effects of the pesticides, the fear of losing a job compelled them to take the risk. The pressure from immediate needs caused workers to overlook the risks despite the long-term health effects.[113]

Since 1979 when the government entered into a tripartite agreement with the employers and the unions, it has not changed the minimum wage laws. The government's main consideration was the need to increase employment opportunities through keeping wage rates in line with worker's productivity as well as the ability of the employers to pay.[114] Officially the KCGA is mandated to negotiate with the KPAWU for the wages in the coffee industry. Normally negotiations are held every two years and they almost always result in wage increment. However, in the last two decades wages have not been reviewed regularly, a factor that is blamed on the ongoing slump in the industry (see chapter four). But this explanation is not foolproof considering that in the past, the coffee industry has enjoyed considerable gains in prices but wages have not been reviewed accordingly. Rather, the profits translated into higher returns for the owners of capital.

Since the 1980s the labour movement has been weak and ineffective. In 1989 COTU was affiliated to Kenya African National Union (KANU), to extend the party's political horizon. By so doing, Kanu had co-opted and by extension controlled the

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[112] Hassan Par tow, 'Pesticide Use and Management in Kenya' (Geneva: Institut Universitaire D'Etudes du Development, 1995).

[113] Personal Communication, William Mwaura, Sunday Plantation, 22 April 2002.

[114] *Ibid.*

entire labour force.[115] Of relevance to this study is the KPAWU which has been a weak and incompetent guardian of the workers' interests. The inflationary condition of the 1990s, fuelled by the depreciation of the shilling and an increase in the price of consumer items, yet it has not been met with commensurate increases in wages. The existing union did little to bargain for the workers. Reports from the Labour Department are replete with trade disputes caused by a range of factors, among them non payment of wages and other dues. The wage increments awarded in recent years are years are indeed a mockery by a government that is committed to poverty alleviation. For instance, in 1999 the Labour Day theme was 'create employment and eradicate poverty', but workers in the agricultural sector received a paltry 7.0 percent increment.[116] This translated to around Sh. 200 or US$ 2.3 which is little to impoverished workers who can barely feed their families. The low increment was justified by the government's motive of keeping wages low in order to retain people in employment but it also entrenches poverty. As the labour movement lost clout in bargaining for the workers, more repressive measures were introduced which made the workers hesitant to engage in industrial action. In most cases workers, lost their jobs for joining strikes that were called by the unions. This scenario compares badly with that of the 1950s when unionism was associated with vibrancy and bore results as was discussed in the early parts of this chapter. Given its recent performance it is no exaggeration to argue that the movement cannot be trusted to represent the interests of the workers, akin to other unions in the country.

Plantation workers have no security in their retirement. Following years of toil and little pay, the often landless workers would leave the plantations empty-handed. As already mentioned, since the late colonial period estates had evolved different retirement schemes for their employees. However, this act of benevolence has waned both formally and informally. To date employers contribute five percent of the total earnings of permanent workers to the National Social Security Fund (NSSF). This money is supposed to be paid to the workers upon their retirement. However, many of

[115] Bethwell Ogot, 'The Decisive Years 1956-1963' in B. Ogot and William Ochieng' (eds.) *Decolonization and Independence in Kenya 1940-93* (London: James Currey,1995), p.208.

[116] RoK, *Economic Survey 2000* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 2000), p.60.

the retired workers expressed a rather disappointing experience with the district NSSF officials. Interviews with retired workers established that it took a lot of time and resources before they finally received their money. In other cases some estates did not remit the deductions to the district NSSF offices and in such circumstances workers could not get their payments processed.[117] Corruption and red tape discouraged many workers from pursuing their benefits. According to one informant who requested not to be named, at times the owners of the estates worked in cahoots with the NSSF officials to frustrate retired workers seeking payment of their pension or terminal benefits.

To the old, plantation life rendered them miserable and destitute, their expectations and ambitions having been smothered by decades in poverty. The harsh working conditions left them weak and inefficient. They felt exploited after spending years on end in the plantations, only to come out poorer. Over the years the number of old people living on plantations has dwindled. Most retirees returned to their rural homes or sought alternative sources of livelihood outside the estates. The old people were psychologically displaced but in the absence of an alternative, they lived there and in some rare cases, were buried there.[118]

In the absence of recreational facilities, the workers have only limited ways of spending their leisure time. Recreational activities are confined to a few football pitches or dartboards and watching television in a few of the financially sound estates. Young men organised themselves into football teams while women are involved in church activities. Lack of social amenities in the last few decades contrasts with the late 1950s when there was a remarkable progress in the provision of welfare services for the workers which was spearheaded by the Ndarugu Group. Rugalema's study findings in plantations in Eastern Kenya suggested that in most agro-estates lack of satisfactory recreational facilities, particularly electricity, resulted in boredom which

[117] Personal Communication, Joseph Mwangi, Thika, 22 February 2002.

[118] Personal Communication, Francis Munyua, Ruiru 25 April 2002.

often led to risky behaviour including alcohol abuse and transactional sex.[119] In short, life on the plantations was somewhat similar and uniform irrespective of its location.

Conditions on the plantations do not facilitate intellectual development. Most of the schools found on the estates were built during the colonial period. Such schools are dilapidated and ill equipped to offer quality education.[120] Crèches and day-care centres are only available on a few estates. These are not really for learning purposes but are more of child day-care centres. Children of different ages are put in one classroom either due to lack of space or teachers. Children are taken to the crèches since their mothers have to work. Most pupils start school when they are either beyond the average school-going age or their progress in school work is rather slow. Most of the plantation workers are mainly primary school dropouts and have little motivation for education (see chapter six).

Since the colonial days plantations have been treated as private property and set apart from society at large. At the entrance of every estate there is a large notice 'trespassers will be prosecuted'. This locked out any form of interaction between the former settled areas and the neighboring reserves. To date the estates and the workers remain isolated and detached from what happens outside the estates. In my opinion the workers appear to be an unrepresented constituency. They expressed ignorance of politics outside the estates. Amidst a weakening labour union life in the estates pose extra challenges that ought to be unpackaged in light of workers awareness and consciousness. Plantation life is part of the colonial legacy which lingers on and has a profound effect on the lives of the workers.

In this chapter we have highlighted the major sources of contradiction between capital and labour in Thika district. Colonial land, labour and taxation policies sought to ensure a steady supply of labour for the settler farmers. The comparative analysis covered the late colonial and post-colonial period. In the labour policies a distinct

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[119] Gabriel Rugalema, *HIV/AIDS and the Commercial Agricultural Sector of Kenya: Impact, Vulnerability, Susceptibility and Coping Strategies (*New York: FAO/UNDP, 1999), pp. 30, 31.

[120] Personal Communication, Margaret Ngendo, Ruiru, 20 April 2002.

pattern of the engagement or labour arrangements can be discerned. Rations and wages were at the discretion of the district associations although it was not uncommon to find planters who overruled decisions set by the district associations. The spate of strikes and protests in the 1950s through the 1960s attest to this. The key consideration of colonial capital was maximising profits, which often hurt workers. The wages, contract arrangements, type of housing and the control over unions are a manifestation of the plight experienced by plantation workers throughout time.

The change of guard in 1963, it has been argued, did not introduce any remarkable changes in terms of work relations. It has been demonstrated that plantation labour has not been transformed for the better, if anything the living conditions have deteriorated over the years. Indeed, agricultural workers remain the most oppressed and underpaid of Kenya’s labour force and live in squalid conditions. Unsurprisingly, some of the workers on the estates were nostalgic for the colonial days. They often cited the provision of rations and the type of schools provided as having been satisfactory. In recent decades irregular payment of wages, arbitrary dismissal and non-payment of terminal benefits remain thorny issues to both workers and the labour unions. Having been co-opted by the KANU regime, COTU lost its clout as a workers' union. Presently, a compromised labour movement tends not to adequately represent the workers’ interests. The vibrancy of the 1950s has been replaced by inertia. It is on the basis of this that plantation workers epitomise chronic poverty in Thika. Further, the 'isolation' in which workers live prevents them from interacting freely with the rest of the society in the district. The workers are an 'unrepresented' constituency given that neither the union nor the politicians take their plight seriously. High levels of illiteracy and the lack of value attached to education have plunged generations after generation into poverty.

CHAPTER SIX

CHILD LABOUR AND TRANSGENERATIONAL POVERTY IN THIKA DISTRICT, 1953-2000

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) defines child labour as any work that is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children.[1] This includes work which interferes with their schooling by depriving them of the opportunity to attend school, by forcing them to leave school prematurely, or requires them to attempt to combine school attendance with excessively long and heavy work. In its worst forms, child labour involves children being enslaved, separated from their families, exposed to serious hazards and illness and/or left to fend for themselves on the streets often at an early age. Although the internationally recommended minimum age for work is 15 years and the number of child workers under the age of 10 is far from negligible, almost all the data available on child labour concerns the 10 to 14 age group.[2] Several international conventions and legal instruments have been adopted to safeguard children against exploitation. It is important that we highlight a few of the most relevant at this point.

In 1973 the ILO adopted the Minimum Age Convention No.138 on child labour and consolidated the underlying principles of earlier conventions. The Convention stated that ratifying state parties:

> Shall raise progressively the minimum age for admission to employment or work to a level consistent with the fullest physical and mental development of young persons. The minimum age shall not be less than 15 years, although developing countries, whose economies, educational and administrative facilities are insufficiently developed may initially permit children of 12-14 years of age to carry out light work of certain types and under certain conditions.[3]

The convention was intended to replace all existing legislation and as such enforce the abolition of child labour.

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[1] ILO, *Eliminating the Worst Forms of Child Labour: A Practical Guide to ILO Convention I82* (United Nations Children's Fund –UNICEF-: No.2, 2002), p.15.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] ILO, Minimum Age Convention 1973, No.138.

Further, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and ILO Convention 182 on the worst forms of child labour (1999), promoted a clearer distinction between child work, a general term including work which is unlikely to damage educational opportunities, and child labour, which refers to harmful forms of work which deny children opportunities to fulfil their other rights, such as education. The Convention has 54 articles which have made a fundamental shift from understanding children as mere objects of international human rights law to one that makes children the subjects of rights. Children should be acknowledged as agents of their own destiny, to which end they have to be accorded the necessary support and empowerment integral for development.[4] According to Article 32:

> State parties recognise the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.[5]

Children are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and are legally protected against work which is detrimental to their physical and mental development. The ‘worst forms of labour’ as defined in ILO Convention 182 include prostitution, all forms of slavery, sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and forced labour, as well as work likely to harm their ‘health, safety and morals’. All signatories are required to identify these forms of labour and develop a national plan of action to eliminate them. Underlying these Conventions is a commitment to promote the ‘best interests’ of the child, although interpretations of these interests can differ considerably.

Kenya has ratified most of the ILO conventions against child labour. Also, she was one of the first countries to join the ILO International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) in 1992 and has signed the Rights of the Child Convention, which became international law in 1990.[6] Kenya has 65 statutes that touch on the issues of children, with the Children’s Act which was enacted in 2001 being the latest legal instrument intended to protect children. In spite of the existence of the

[4] ILO, *Eliminating the Worst Forms of Child Labour*, p.17.

[5] The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child Article 32.

[6] Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), *Child Labour in Kenya* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1999), p. 5.

conventions against the employment of children it is a pervasive and persistent practice in Kenya.

The records on child labour that are available from the Ministry of Labour and the respective district Labour Departments are not up to date and do not reflect the magnitude of the problem of child labour in the country. Surveys conducted on child labour are poorly co-ordinated and data that is available is somewhat conflicting if not unreliable.[7] This makes it very difficult to establish how many children work or have dropped out of school in the country. The loopholes in the record keeping and enforcement of regulations are conduits that are used by employers to exploit and violate the rights of working children. But according to evidence that has been unearthed by various stakeholders, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), government departments and independent researches, child labour has been an on-going phenomenon, although absent in most of the government documents. For these reasons this chapter relies extensively on primary data.

For purposes of this study, child labour is defined as the participation of children who are below the stipulated minimum legal age (16) and are employed in hazardous environments that compromise their physical and psychological development. Child labour denies working children time to play and attend school which are crucial to their psychological development and preparation for adulthood. Although there are children who successfully combine schooling and working, these are few. Our concern lies with those who work full-time.

This chapter provides a perspective on the relationship between poverty and child labour. It is predicated on the assumption that poverty begets child labour and vice versa. It is argued that the relationship between poverty and child labour is bi-directional. That is, poverty causes child labour and the reverse is also true. Also, child labour should be understood in terms of vulnerability and powerlessness. Using the paradigm of child protection, child labour is perceived as an aspect of gross violation of children's rights. Child labour denies children an opportunity to attend school. In many cases, child labour campaigns are inspired by a 20th century western

[7] CBS, *Child Labour in Kenya*, pp. iii, iv.

ideal of childhood as a time of dependency during which the child should be protected from work and responsibility.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section traces the genesis and development of child labour during the colonial period. The second section focuses on the sectors that employ children in the post-colonial period. The third section assesses how child labour militates against the breaking of the yoke of poverty and reinforces intergenerational poverty.

The Late Colonial Period, 1953-1963

In African social systems children and youths have always been regarded as powerful symbols of the vitality and continuity of families and communities. They were also considered as the bearers and guarantors of the future of society. Childhood was therefore considered as a very important stage in life. In many countries, the use of children as domestic servants was regarded as a socially acceptable traditional practice.[8] Kenya is no exception to the perception of children as a symbol of posterity.

Child labour can be traced back to the pre-colonial period in which time labour was organised along age and gender lines. Specific tasks were assigned to children as part of their training in agriculture and herding. Among the Kikuyu, Kenyatta posits that as a child grew up his or her sphere of activities in gardening increased. Instead of small fields, a large one was provided according to the capability of the child.[9] Similarly, Mbiti observed that at home there were duties which children were expected to perform as their share in the life of the family….they helped in the work around the house and in the fields, in looking after cattle, fishing, and hunting, building houses, running on errands as well as learning the trade or skills of their parents.[10] Young boys were assigned herding tasks while girls assisted in household

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[8] IPEC, *Child Domestic Workers, A Handbook for Research and Action* (London: Antislavery International: IPEC, 1997), p.2.

[9] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya* (London: Martin Secker and Warburg, 1938), p. 56.

[10] John Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion* (London: Heinemann, 1975), p.109.

chores. This was part of training in preparation of adulthood tasks. It was also accompanied by informal education from the elders. As was discussed in the previous chapters the settler economy was fuelled mainly by wage labour provided by the Africans. The administration proved on the whole sympathetic to settler pressures, and the state applied direct coercion to deal both with the problem of recruitment and that of ensuring that African labourers stayed at work.

During the First World War, the demand for labour rose steeply. This was mainly because of conscription and expansion of infrastructure that required a bigger labour force, as well as the expansion of cash crop enterprises, particularly in growing coffee, tea, maize and sisal, which meant greater demands were placed on the existing pool of labour. In 1916 the Kiambu District Commissioner reported that the reserve was so depleted of men that women and children were doing work traditionally performed by men.[11] In addition to creating a scarcity of men to assist women in the production of food for consumption, military conscription of African males placed the added burden of providing a pool of wage labourers on Kikuyu women and children.

The involvement of the provincial administration in the recruitment of labour for the settlers reached a peak in 1919-21, coinciding with the most serious shortage of labour. To curb the shortage, the Governor issued the infamous ‘Northey circulars’.[12] According to the circulars women and children could work on the estates so long as they returned home each evening.[13] This was the first legislation concerning child labour. In time other directives regarding the regulations governing the employment of children were issued.

During the colonial period, Africans at the periphery of white settlements such as Thika sent their children to work in the farms and homes of settlers to earn money to

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[11] KNA/KBU: Kiambu District Annual Report, 1915-1916.

[12] The circulars embraced the principle of ‘encouragement’ of men, women and children to go out and work.

[13] Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley: conflict in Kenya and Africa Book One: State and Class* (London: James Currey, 1992), p.111.

pay taxes.[14] In the district children worked primarily in the sisal, coffee and tea plantations. In most cases tasks assigned to an adult took longer than a day to complete. Thus children accompanied their parents to assist them complete the tasks assigned to them. Also, the settlers hired children on their own to work either as herdboys, coffee pickers or to undertake any form of manual work. During the coffee picking season the number of women and children who were employed in the coffee sector rose steeply and numbered perhaps 30,000 by 1927.[15] In 1946 children accounted for 21 percent of the economically active population in the colony.[16] By the early 1950s the Labour Department noted that in the coffee estates women and children were employed in large numbers, especially during the picking, weeding and pruning seasons.[17] The children worked for long hours yet no legal action was meted against the planters who violated the rights of working children.

The Emergency Regulations imposed in the wake of the Mau Mau struggle compounded a shortage of labour that was being experienced in the colony as we noted in the previous chapter. Subsequently, a considerable number of children were recruited to work on the coffee farms. To facilitate the recruitment of juveniles the colonial state relaxed the enforcement of laws on employment of children through the issuance of the Employment of Juveniles Rules of 1952, government notice No.616152.[18] This was followed by the employment of 'an efficient daily, casual female and child labour'.[19] Usually guardians and parents introduced children to potential employers who subsequently completed the necessary forms with the district Labour Department. This suggests an organised form of recruitment of children which was likely to protect the juveniles and children. However, to circumvent the law some

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[14] CBS, *Child Labour in Kenya*, p.1.

[15] Bruce Berman, *Control and Crisis in Colonial Kenya: The Dialectic of Domination* (London: James Currey, 1990), p.158.

[16] CBS, *Child Labour in Kenya*, p. 48.

[17] KNA/AF/1/1: Thika District Labour Department Reports 1952-1960.

[18] KNA/AF/1/6: Thika District Labour Quarterly Reports 1954-57.

[19] *Ibid.*

employers recruited children informally, without going through the procedures laid down by the Labour Department. Often such employers did not keep records of the children in their employ.[20] This loophole was employed by estate owners who engaged children to work in risky environments including operating machines in the sisal factories.[21] Arguably, the high demand for employment made it possible for less scrupulous employers to contravene the rules governing the employment of children. Thika district, being at the heartland of White Highlands, became a centre of children seeking employment. In January 1957 the Thika Labour Department noted that there was an upsurge in the number of juveniles illegally entering the district from Fort Hall in search of work to enable them pay school fees or their parents' poll tax.[22]

The control of child labour was enforced through frequent labour and wage inspections although there were problems in distinguishing real child labourers from those doing child work. But even then, there were hurdles that hindered the effective control of child labour. The district Labour Officer reported that an attempt to nab school children who were illegally employed as domestic servants proved futile because all the children, except one, claimed not to be in gainful employment.[23]

From the foregoing it is clear that children were employed mainly to raise money to pay school fees or taxes for their parents. This mirrors the effects of the monetary economy among the residents of Thika. It also suggests that the wages paid to parents proved insufficient and therefore children were compelled to work to supplement household income. The legislation against the use of child labour did not prevent the engagement of children since children and employers colluded against officers from the Labour Department and made it difficult to distinguish those who were in gainful employment from those who were assisting in domestic work.

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[20] Under the Employment Act an employer was expected to keep a register with the particulars of a child's age, reserve, and medical report, date of recruitment and wage rates.

[21] KNA/AF/1/6: Thika District Labour Quarterly Reports 1954-57.

[22] KNA/VQ/16/4: Thika District Monthly Reports 1954-1958

[23] KNA/AF/1/6: Thika District Labour Quarterly Reports 1954-57.

The trend in the 1960s closely resembled that of the 1950s despite the fact that restrictions on the employment of the Kikuyu Embu and Meru (KEM) had been relaxed (see chapter five). Employment of children continued to escalate and therefore child labour was used to fill the gap created by the ban on the employment of the KEM. This may have exacerbated the shortage of employment but did not explain fully the use of children and juvenile labour. For instance, in 1962 six employers, among them Messrs. Ngoliba, were granted permission by the district Labour Department to employ children and juveniles. The children were expected to do domestic work and were entitled to a monthly wage of between Sh. 30 and 75 as well as ration.[24]

At the same time, some of the requests from employers were rejected, especially if they indicated that children were to be employed for long hours away from their parents and were not being provided with adequate welfare services. This explains why some less scrupulous employers opted for the informal way of recruiting children. A penalty of Sh. 200 was imposed on those who flouted the regulations of the Employment of Children and Juveniles Act.[25] The efficiency of the Act is examined shortly.

The employment of children in the informal sector, as petty traders or hawkers, pointed to a new trajectory of child labour during the colonial period. In some cases, children who were pushed out of formal sector by legislation often resorted to self-employment. It was commonplace to find juveniles selling flowers and vegetables to workers and other customers on the Nairobi-Thika road. However, this trading was short-lived. Suspicious of the source of the commodities traded by the children, the district Labour Officer issued a directive that cautioned people against buying this produce and alleged that the 'products were stolen from neighbouring African holdings'.[26] Following this directive, children who were found hawking were rounded

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[24] KNA/1/5: Thika and Kiambu Districts Senior Labour Inspectors Reports 1961-62.

[25] *Ibid.*

[26] *Ibid.*

up and interrogated. It followed from the arrested children's testimonies that they had been sent by their parents to sell the items to raise an income to be spent on household items.[27] It was difficult to find out whether the claims were true but hawking by children was an enterprising and innovative way of earning a livelihood, although it was considered too 'dramatic' a coping strategy by the concerned authorities. Without necessarily condoning child labour, the above cases reflect creativity of both children and parents in their efforts to overcome economic hurdles, a process that continued even after independence.

The Post-Colonial Period, 1964-2000

Kenya has completed over 40 years of independence and has no reported cases of child slavery or recruitment of children for use in armed conflict but there is evidence that some worst forms of child labour do exist in the country. Children work in both formal and informal sectors, within or outside family enterprises. Working children subsidise both the national economy and that of their respective households. More significantly, working undermines the children's physical, social, emotional and spiritual development. It violates their basic rights to education, development, health and recreation. The close relationship between the rising numbers of working children and the dwindling prospects for improved economic and social development in Kenya causes concern. In the remainder of this chapter we interrogate the factors that push children to employment, the sectors where they work and the ramifications.

In 197I a presidential decree abolished tuition fees for the areas that were previously marginalised. This was an attempt to correct historical distortions and facilitate fair distribution of resources (see chapter one). A further step to increase accessibility of education was taken in 1974 when the government abolished all levies charged in lower primary school countrywide. This was followed by an increase in enrolment levels.

In addition, the Employment Act, 1976, and the Employment (Children) Rules, 1977 are legal instruments that were put in place to monitor and regulate the employment of

[27] *Ibid.*

children. Section 25 of the Employment Act prohibits employment of children under the age of 16 in any industrial undertaking, unless such employment is part of apprenticeship or indentured learnership.[28] According to the Act, industrial undertakings include factories, mines, quarries, construction and transport sub-sectors. Children were permitted to work if they obtained special permission from the Ministry of Labour or were working in a family enterprise. Further, in 1979 Kenya ratified the Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (138), and the present legislation draws on this Convention and Kenya has pledged to adhere to Recommendation No.146. However, the above rules are not without defects.

First, the Employment Act is silent on the employment of children in the agricultural and domestic sectors. It is well known that these two sectors are infamous for use of child labour. Second, even with the introduction of free primary education there was a serious problem of high drop-out rate. For example, education statistics at the national level showed that only 37 percent of those who entered primary school in 1974 were able to reach standard seven.[29] The high drop-out rate and attrition can be explained in terms of opportunity cost. That is, although the government paid fees, parents were expected to meet some of the recurrent costs of schooling. This is not a simple question of cost alone but is impeded in social mores and values and high attrition. Access to primary schooling is compromised by the opportunity costs to families who require the labour of their learning children and these indirect costs are multiplied by the direct costs families have to meet such as buying uniforms and other running costs. The total amounts could have been in the range of Sh.200 or less but at time this was unaffordable for a majority of the parents in Thika, many of whom were peasant farmers or plantation workers. To parents of such meagre income the opportunity cost of schooling was considered as an extra cost that could be ignored.

The close relationship between the rising numbers of working children and the dwindling prospects for improved socio-economic development in Kenya cannot be left out in a study on poverty. The factors that have brought child labour to the fore

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[28] RoK, Laws of Kenya Cap 226 commencing in May 1976.

[29] Philista Onyango, 'Child Labour Policies and Programmes in Kenya' in Assefa Bequele and Jo Boyden (eds.) *Combating Child Labour* (Geneva: ILO, 1988), p.165.

are highlighted in order to set a background against which the dynamics of child labour can be discussed. First, since the 1980s the problem of child labour has continued to receive global concern. Indeed, there has been a wave sweeping across the globe on the need to recognise and respect children's rights. Child labour is seen as a violation of human rights. At the forefront of these campaigns have been lobby groups and human rights activists who advise people to boycott products that are produced using child labour. As has already been mentioned, under the ILO Convention 182 there is a radical shift from understanding children as mere objects of international human rights law to one that makes children subjects of their own destiny, to which end they have to be accorded an empowering and supportive environment. During the 1980s, official thinking about the issue of child and youth labour experienced something of a shift in paradigm, that is, moving away from a purely abolitionist perspective, towards one of empowerment. This entailed according support and protection to working children.

Second, the continuing global economic recession compromised many of the children's rights. It is argued that the problem of working children in its depth and spread cannot be explained outside the local and international socio-economic dynamics that have moulded Kenyan society over the years. Third, the problem of child labour in Kenya can be equated to a reflection of a society whose social security systems and mechanisms of caring are on a decline. The extent to which this is the case will be interrogated in the remainder of this chapter.

The 1989 and 1999 Censuses showed that about 45 percent of the Kenyan population were children aged between 10 and 15 years.[30] In an economy that was undergoing economic reforms that entailed extensive shedding of jobs, rising poverty and other forms of deprivation compounded the problem of dependency. The harsh socio-economic reality from the 1980s as manifested in poverty and unemployment of adults continually forced the affected households to withdraw their children from school in order to work and supplement familial incomes.

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[30] CBS, *Kenya Population Census Report 1998* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1999), p.iv.

By around 2000 Kenya had 1.9 million children, aged between five and 17 who were working countrywide in various sectors.[31] Commercial agriculture absorbed 34 percent of the total, subsistence agriculture and fishing absorbed 23.6 and 17.9 percent respectively.[32] Available evidence, however scanty, points towards an extensive use of children in Kiambu and Thika districts. In the next section we focus on the use of child labour in the agricultural sector and quarries.

As already mentioned, commercial agriculture absorbs a majority of working children countrywide. Thika district being an epicentre of commercial farming – monocropping and mixed – has had a long history of engaging child labourers. Children were engaged in coffee picking as well as cultivation. Between November and January (peak season) and March and May (mini-crop) children were employed in great numbers. Both seasons coincide with school terms therefore locking children in a dilemma, either to attend school or pick coffee.

In the 1980s children were employed in the coffee plantations found in Kiambu, Thika and Murang'a districts.[33] In many cases children worked alongside their parents, particularly mothers. In 1981 the Central Provincial Commissioner (PC) warned parents, especially those in Thika against withdrawing their children from school in order to send them to pick coffee in the plantations.[34] Apparently parents did not heed this directive and children continued to be transported in congested lorries and trucks to pick coffee. The trend in the 1990s was not different from that of the 1980s. For instance, a follow up of a study conducted in the 1980s revealed that in 1991, 12,000 Kenyan children were working in coffee estates in Kiambu district.[35] These children contributed to the 58 and 18 percent of the children who made up the

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[31] *Ibid.*, p.v.

[32] *Ibid.*

[33] D. Kayongo-Male and P. Walji, *Children at Work in Kenya* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1984), p.54.

[34] KNA/AMC/15/15: Thika Division Monthly Reports Other Departments 1981.

[35] N. Bwibo and O.Onyango, ‘Final Report of the Child Labour and Health Research’ (WHO/Nairobi: University of Nairobi, 1987), p.107.

labour force in coffee plantations during the peak seasons and low seasons respectively.[36] The case of Makuyu in Kakuzi division illustrates this. In this division it was noted that during coffee picking seasons some mothers withdrew their children from school in order to accompany them to work on the multinational corporations such as those of Kakuzi and Socfinaf Coffee Estates, as well as on smallholdings.

There are two main characteristics that define Kakuzi division. First, residents of this area have small land acreage while a good number are squatters as was discussed in chapter two. Second, the area experiences erratic rainfall and residents are faced with chronic food shortage (see chapter three). At the district level the pervasive nature of child labour can be explained by an array of factors. Lack of school fees and laxity in the enforcement of legislation from the authorities may have played a role in the perpetuation of child labour. A study in the 1990s indicated that among the poor in Gatundu division, school fees took up a high proportion of a household's expenditure.[37] For those households whose incomes may have been unstable or constrained it was therefore likely that children could be withdrawn from school. It is argued that being born in a poor household increased the likelihood of one being a child labourer. Therefore it became hard to break the cycle of vicious poverty which was then passed on from one generation to the next. Indeed those who were mainly interviewed on the estates belonged to third and fourth generation of former or retired plantation workers.

With harsh economic conditions the numbers of working children increased in the late 1990s. At the national level, between 1995 and 1998 an estimated 17,000 children were engaged in contractual employment on various plantations.[38] On average 2,300 children were employed in Thika's 123 farms if on average each of the farms

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[36] United States Department of Labor, *The Sweat and Toil of Children, vol.*ii (Washington, 1995) p.47.

[37] Ruth Kiboro, 'An Empirical Analysis of Household Expenditure Patterns in Rural Kenya: A Case Study of Gatundu Division' (MA.Thesis, Kenyatta University, 1992), p.52.

[38] Philip Ngunjiri, "Child Labour on the Rise" in *Inter Press Service*, 6 December 1998.

employed 100 children per day in 1998.[39] In 2000, J.N. Ndiho, the Thika District Labour Officer, noted that child labour was rampant, particularly in the coffee estates.[40] Poverty was identified as one reason why children were working. Several intervention measures were mounted by both NGOs and government agents to combat the use of child labour in the district (see chapter eight). In particular, the district Labour Office had issued stringent measures to coffee estate managers to desist from employing children. A penalty of Sh. 2,000 was imposed on defaulters but by all standards this was too low to act as a deterrent to the use of child labour in the district. During the coffee flash or peak coffee harvest many estates employed children in total disregard of the legislation, penalty or the regardless of consequences.[41] This implied that unless all the stakeholders and shareholders take cognisance of the long-term effects of child labour, elimination of child labour remains a pipe-dream. Indeed, on a number of coffee estates, the managers denied that children were employed on their estates even though evidence from children within and outside the estates contradicted this position. The management of such estates refused to allow photographs to be taken of children picking coffee. To a large extent the level of denial and conniving has hampered the elimination of child labour over the decades.

In other instances, children only worked during the holidays and weekends, but this does not mean some children did not abandon school to seek gainful employment. Indeed, one government official ascribed the prevalence of child labour to the political influence of the owners of the coffee and horticultural farms. According to the officer, the estates were owned by the Thika elite, an influential political and economic group that indirectly perpetuated the use of child labour. He insisted that these entrepreneurs were the policy makers and were not keen to enforce child labour regulations. He was however quick to point out that the media had exaggerated in their reporting on the extent to which child labour was used in the district.[42] This had

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[39] *Ibid*.

[40] RoK, Thika District Annual Report, Department of Labour, 2000, p.4.

[41] Personal Communication, Samwel Mwaniki, Ruiru, 23 May 2002.

[42] The concerned informant requested to remain anonymous in this report.

consequently, bred unnecessary animosity between various stakeholders involved in efforts to combat child labour in the area.

Another notable feature of child labour in the district was the employment of children by means of verbal and written contracts. A majority of the children were verbally employed under the pretext of helping their mothers to complete their daily tasks. This arrangement would be acceptable if only it was applicable during the weekends, holidays or after school hours, but often it conflicted with the school calendar and subsequently schooling. Many of the children who were spotted on the coffee plantations were aged between 7 and 14 years. It was established that some of the estates made it mandatory for the children residing on the estates to work or quit.[43] Although sometimes children worked after school, this denied them sufficient time for their school work and affected their overall performance.

Those who were not resident on the estates had to walk an average of three kilometres daily. Where transport was provided by the estate owners, lorries and tractors picked up workers, including children between 5.30 and 6.30 am. Children, like adult workers, were away for close to 12 hours as they were dropped off between 5.00 and 7.00 pm. The children were packed like sardines in the lorries and had to fight for air to survive or risk suffocation while in transit. What was most alarming was that quite often these lorries or trucks were unroadworthy and prone to be involved in road accidents and most often the vehicles were not insured.[44]

Among the myriad problems that working children face was hunger. Most of the children lived on buns or *mandazi* that are hawked around the estates. A few children carried packed food although this was rare, considering that these children came from homes where food was scarce. The types of food that was commonly carried included *ugali na sukuma wiki* (Kiswahili for pap and kales). There was no lunch break, thus, the children ate as they struggled to work. Often the supervisors reprimanded those

[43] Federation of Kenya Employers (FKE), 'Child Labour on Commercial Agriculture in Africa' (Technical Workshop on Child Labour, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, 27-30 August 1996).

[44] Personal Communication, Margaret Mugure, Gatundu, 5 May 2002.

who attempted to take a lunch break. Children were generally malnourished and showed signs of nutritional deficiency and those of water-borne diseases.

Children were subjected to heavy workloads and were expected to handle dangerous farm equipment. Also, they were also exposed to agrochemicals without necessarily being provided with protective clothing. Children were also exposed to physical risks such as dangerously climbing coffee trees or hanging on moving tractors and lorries. Limb injuries resulting from falls from coffee trees, skin problems, sight failure and breathing problems were commonly reported.[45]

The owners of the coffee estates made deliberate efforts to recruit children for various reasons. First, children were paid a pittance since they did not belong to a union and often were not aware of their rights, including that of the minimum wages. Whereas women were paid Sh. 100 (US$ 1.04), the rate at which children were paid varied between employers but it was usually less than US$ 1 per day.[46] Second, children were docile, easy to manipulate and followed instructions without questions. For instance, children could bend for a whole day with minimal complaints. Third, in instances where estate management were strict in enforcing legislation against employment of children, parents and guardians bribed supervisors to allow their children to work. Thus employment of children was well received by the mothers who valued the children's contribution to the household income. This not only compromised their bargaining power but countered efforts to combat child labour in the district. There was therefore complicity of parents in the employment of their own children through no fault of their own.

The use of child workers was particularly rampant where macadamia nut farming is widespread in Thika district. Since the onset of the slump in the coffee industry, most estates have diversified their economic base with macadamia nut farms having proliferated in the last one decade or so. The most prominent growers are the Muthaiti and Bob Harries estates. Macadamia nut farms range from 50 to 200 acres. The

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[45] CBS, *Child Labour in Kenya*, p.v.

[46] Their earnings fell below Sh. 998, the stipulated minimum wage, for unskilled employees aged below 18 years working in the agricultural sector, under Regulations of Wages Order, 1998.

macadamia nut tree is propagated from seeds. The tree matures in five years. Once the nuts ripen, they fall to the ground and children are employed to collect them. Although harvesting is carried out all the year round the owners of the estates prefer to have casual employees in order to cut down on costs (see chapter five).

Some employers viewed employment of children as a social responsibility to help poor families by offering a sort of informal apprenticeship. Nevertheless, the underlying reason why small informal entrepreneurs used child labour was that children’s wages were much lower. Sometimes the use of child labour was not cheap because their concentration level was low and they also require close supervision. The owners of the macadamia nut estates, however, seemed to prefer to employ children who did not have to be absent from work and did not ask for higher pay compared to adults. The practice of child labour is consistent with cultural perceptions that the young perform work including herding and picking up the nuts better than adults can. Children can bend the whole day without complaining of having a back ache, for instance. This was reported by a woman supervisor on one of the estates.

In many parts of Ruiru young boys engaged in herding. The boys are aged between 7 and 14 years. In some cases animals were grazed in a communal arrangement, in which case several livestock owners employed one boy to herd their animals together. Boys were reportedly better in many ways than adult males. First, they could give chase to straying animals. Second, their wages were lower than those paid to grown men herding animals. It was gathered from the various informants that the monthly wage ranged between Sh.300 and 700 (US$7-9). Third, and more significantly, the boys were not likely to ‘lose’ the animals.[47] Most of the herdboys had dropped out of school. The conditions under which they were working were unfavourable. They were either exposed to extremely cold or hot weather conditions. As with children who were working in the coffee plantations, the herdboys did not take regular meals. In most cases the boys relied on maize and potatoes stolen from farms near the grazing fields. Following is a photograph and description of Nathan, who is a herdboy in Ruiru division:

[47] There were claims that most herdsmen secretly sell the animals and later charge that the animals disappeared while they were in the field. That was the reason that was advanced for preferring boys to herd animals.

Figure 1: Nathan at Work

Nathan who is aged 14 years is a herdboy in Ruiru division. I met him at around 3 pm after he had returned from watering the animals. Nathan was the last born in a family of five, three girls and two boys. He was born of a single mother in Kamwangi division. His mother passed away when he was nine years old. He was forced to drop out of school. He then migrated to Murera in Ruiru division where he lived with his maternal grandmother. He had been in the job for more than three years, taking charge of a herd of about 40 animals of both goats and cattle. His working day began at 7:15 am when the owners of the animals delivered them to a central point from where he picked them up. He herded the animals the whole day in fields of his own choice. The Murera farm was one of the sisal and coffee-growing estates in the colonial period. It was bought by a group of people some of whom had not settled there leaving a lot of idle land on which the animals were grazed. Nathan watered the animals at midday after which he grazed the animals in the vicinity of the central point where the owners of the animals collected them at 5 pm. He herded every day of the week including Sundays. With his savings he bought a small radio which kept him entertained during the lonely day. He enjoyed listening to the vernacular (Kikuyu) programmes which he claimed to be educative and full of advice. He was paid Sh. 50 and 25 per month for every cow and goat in the herd, respectively. He also herded the young goats at no cost at all. He had to withstand extremely hot and cold weather conditions. He seldom sheltered himself even when it rained. He lamented the penalty

> imposed whenever an animal was lost. He was emphatic that he had to pay for any animals mauled by wild animals, particularly the hyenas, although this was not a common occurrence. In the previous year he had to pay Sh. 700 for a goat he lost, which was heavy given his meagre earnings. He was certain that he could have continued with schooling had he not lost his mother. For his future, Nathan looked forward to saving enough to buy a piece of land. So far he had saved Sh.1600 which was in the custody of one of the owners of the cattle that he herded.[48]

The fact that there was no fee charged for the small goats points towards some form of exploitation of the Nathan by the owners of the animals. He was insistent that the animals were small to warrant a fee being charged on them and yet in the event that he lost animals he had to compensate the owners for the loss. Nathan did not attend school. He was a victim of the untimely death of his mother. The fact that his elder sisters did not take care of his schooling reflects on failing social capital. Although, he reported that they were poor but they could have afforded to pay his school fees, at least up to grade eight.

Most importantly, Nathan like other working children was condemned to perpetual poverty since he missed the opportunity to acquire essential life skills that would probably secure him a stable source of income in the future. Again, in his old age he cannot be employed to herd animals for reasons that were outlined at the beginning of this section. This mirrors the dependency that child labour creates. His aspiration to save enough money to buy land is quite a far-fetched one given his income but it sheds some light on the perspective of a working child. The children have not yet resigned themselves to fate but if they are exposed to an empowering environment and are accorded the necessary support they have the potential to make a positive impact on their own lives and secure their future.

The use of child labour in quarries, though a recent development, is quite widespread in the district. Most quarries are located near rivers or in the marginal areas such as Juja Farm, Gatuanyaga, Gatundu and Kamwangi. During my visit to a quarry I witnessed children of different ages crushing stones. It was clear that this type of child labour is part and parcel of the household as a unit of production. In this section various examples are used to illustrate this point. Children aged between 4 and 16 years toiled the whole day in the stone quarries. The children's day began at 6 am

48 Personal Communication, Nathan Njoroge, Ruiru, 3 March 2002.

when they started to trek to quarries which are located at least two kilometres away from their homes. The activities at the quarry started with collection of flakes or broken stones left by the stone diggers after dressing the stones to the desired sizes and shapes. The children collected the stone flakes and put them in a sack before carrying them to the surface. Then the children sat and crushed them into small pebbles that were used in building construction. Figure 2 captures Nancy as she carries the stones from a quarry before she embarks on the daunting exercise of crushing them into ballast.

Figure 2: Nancy Carrying Stones from a Quarry

Nancy is 12 years old and has been in the quarry industry for at least three years. She was born in a family of seven and she accompanied her mother to the quarry every day of the week except Sunday. Nancy was sent away from school in 1999 because she did not have the necessary school textbooks. Previously she had spent a few weeks at home and returned to school but this was the last time that she attended school. After staying at home for a month, she joined other children who worked in a neighbouring quarry. She thought that after working in the quarry she could buy at least two textbooks and return to school. With time she developed friendship with other girls in the quarry

> who convinced her to carry on with stone crushing. She was never able to withdraw from the quarry.[49]

Cases similar to that of Nancy where lack of textbooks marks the end of a child's schooling were replicated at the district level as well as nationally. In a recent study on the affordability of textbooks in Kenya, Rotich showed that parents who have low incomes are very reluctant to purchase textbooks. To such parents, the prices are exorbitant and to many irrelevant, too.[50] They only buy what they consider to be the 'key' texts after consulting teachers and other people whom they consider to be informed in education matters. Pupils who lack textbooks are prone to absenteeism, truancy and stand a high chance of dropping out of school. Indeed, in 2004, one year after the reintroduction of free primary education, children could still be found working in the quarries. Parents argued that they could not adequately provide food and uniforms and therefore their children had to accompany them to the quarries. Therefore it is not enough to provide free primary school education because other essential needs remain unmet and this keeps children away from school.

[49] Personal Communication, Nancy Njuguini, Ruiru, 13 May 2002.

[50] Rotich, Daniel, 'The Affordability of School Textbooks in Kenya: Consumer Experiences in the Transformation to a Liberalising Economy', *Nordic Journal of African Studies,* 13, 2, (2004), pp. 182, 184.

Figure 3: A Family at Work in a Quarry

Quarries were a form of family unit of production. Many of the parents argued that they were landless so their children had nowhere to cultivate and had to assist in them in quarries. Therefore working in the quarries was similar to engaging in any family enterprise or domestic chores and it was therefore not necessarily considered as gainful employment. Also, to the parents working in the quarries was seen as a way of teaching their children a trade. Children assisted their parents to crush as much ballast as possible and increase their income per day. All members of a family worked for long hours because they were paid according to the amount of ballast they were able to crush. In an average day an adult could crush 60 kilograms or three buckets of ballast worth Sh. 45 (US$ 0.5). About 200 buckets fill a lorry load. While working intermittently it takes about three weeks to fill a lorry load which sells at Sh.1, 500. A regular crusher can fill a lorry load within a week. Overall the earnings were meagre and households that were dependent on stone crushing lived at the margins of survival and these were the majority.

The story of Mwangi aged 13 years is pitiful and depicts the tension between schooling and working to augment household income. He had dropped out of school in standard five. His father who was a cobbler in a neighbouring shopping centre could not afford school fees. His mother was a housewife, to whom he took his earnings. He said that the mother used the money to buy food. He kept very little money himself but he was proud that he was helping to earn a livelihood for the family.[51]

The case of Mwangi depicts the marginalisation of children in an equally impoverished society. The attitude and values of working children are determined by their immediate needs. In the words of Tacon, 'their values are the values of survival'.[52] Mwangi's case, like those of other working children, confirms Tacon's argument. Accordingly, many of those working in the quarries preferred to secure a sort of contract or be hired by the owners of quarries. This arrangement guaranteed them instant payment for their labour as opposed to when they crushed ballast to sell at an unpredictable date. Also this arrangement cushioned children against different uncertainties wrought by changes in prices and weather. In the short-run, it worked well for the children but in the long-term the children were underpaid and overworked by those who hired them. It was after children had overcome their immediate needs that they gradually began to crush stones to sell in future.

Mothers working on the quarries were too poor to employ house helps and were therefore forced to carry their infants to the quarries. At the quarries the young children and infants were subjected to the scorching sun and the dust from the crushing activities. Noise pollution, caused by *baruti* (explosives) that were used to blast the rocks, posed extra risks to the health of infants and other children working in that environment. Indeed chemical and radiation have a profound effects on the health

[51] Personal Communication, Henry Mwangi, Gatuanyaga, 4 April 2002.

[52] P. Tacon, 'A Global Overview of Social Mobilization on Behalf of Street Children' in W.E. Myers (ed.) *Protecting Working Children* (London: Zed books, 1991), p.88.

of children whose immune system is still developing. Figure 4 shows a mother breastfeeding her baby beside heaps of ballast or *ngoto*.

Figure 4: A Mother Breastfeeds Her Baby Beside Heaps of Ballast

Children were subjected to physical toil such as carrying heavy loads. The nature of the work forced them to adopt unnatural positions at work that is liable to deform or disable growing bodies. Such children stood the risk of suffering from deformation of the spinal column. Children were also expected to load the lorries with the ballast. Injured fingers, blisters, sore eyes, skin irritation and chest pains were common although both adult and child workers regarded them as inevitable 'accidents' that could not stop them from working. Many of the mothers who accompanied children to the quarries admitted that they knew that a packet of milk a day would soothe their irritated throats but the cost was prohibitive.[53] They assumed that milk would 'soothe' their chests and throats that were perpetually exposed to toxins emitted from the stones and the explosives used in the quarries.

[53] Personal Communication, Irene Wangui, Ruiru, 24 April 2002.

Some unscrupulous customers induced the children to sell them the ballast below the market price. Moreover, competition for customers prevailed, particularly before the onset of rains when everybody desired to dispose of their piles. During the rainy season, quarries became inaccessible and therefore no sales were undertaken during that period. The slump in the market for ballast resulted in a substantial loss of income for most of the households which relied on the quarries for a livelihood. In most cases, families resorted to other sources of livelihood, some of which are discussed in chapter eight.

It was apparent that the parents of working children had low literacy levels. Few had attained only primary school level of education and fewer had received four years of secondary education. Consequently, the workers did not value education even for their own children. Most the working children lacked role models and had low aspirations in life. To many of the parents investment in education was not a priority. However, there were a few children who had managed to acquire a university education, although this was the exception.

The practice of sending children to stay with relatives in urban areas was prevalent in Thika. The children ended up as housemaids of relatives or of their friends. The girls were often mistreated by their employers and in some cases they were turned into sexual servants for males in the homes where they were employed (chapter seven). Such girls were victims of considerable physical and emotional exploitation. To emancipate themselves some of these girls resorted to prostitution in order to avoid menial and physical jobs. The plight of girls who were in the domestic sector is represented by the following transcript of my interview with Esther:

> Esther is aged 11 years. She was taken away by her grandmother's neighbour to work in Thika as a maid. Her mother died in 1999 when Esther was in standard eight. It was rumoured that she had died of AIDS-related complications although Esther vehemently denied the rumours. Esther was employed for a wage of Sh.750 per month. The money was paid to her grandmother who was also taking care of Esther's siblings. Once in Thika, Esther reported that she was frequently physically abused by her employer. She was not allowed to sit in the lounge and was only permitted to eat after everyone else. She was expected to buy her own toiletries. One day Esther eloped with her employer's neighbour. After three months, Esther fell pregnant

> and the man chased her away. At the time of the interview, Esther was six months pregnant and appeared to have given up on life.[54]

Similar cases of psychological and emotional abuse abound in the district. Violence and sexual abuse were among the most serious and frightening hazards faced by working children in Thika where even relatives molest and harass orphans. In 2000, the United Nations agencies in Kenya observed that the burgeoning population of children orphaned by AIDS contributed towards an increase in child-headed households and 'inevitably' in child labour.[55]

It is important to note that children were employed in many other sectors. In the transport or *matatu* industry young boys are employed as touts while others engage in petty trade. In most of the sectors where child labour was in use, covert measures were employed to ensure that the practice was disguised as household labour such as a family business in order to avoid suspicion from the law enforcement agents. Those who employed children were conscious that it was wrong and therefore resorted to such ruses. The next section focuses on the circumstances that forced children to seek employment.

From the foregoing the link between poverty and child labour in Thika can be discerned. According to the definition of poverty that was provided in the introduction, households whose children had dropped out of school were considered as being very poor. Also, renting a house in the rural areas was also taken as an indicator of poverty by the residents of Thika.

The prevalence of child labour can best be understood in the context of economic terms. The worth of children in developing countries tends to be measured in terms of their economic value. Thus children become a desirable asset for struggling parents since they can significantly contribute to family income. Child labour is therefore an intrinsic component of survival. Children are instrumental in augmenting both household and national economies. For instance, a study that was carried out in 2003

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[54] Personal Communication, Esther Mumbi,   Ruiru, 29 March 2002.

[55] United Nations, Common Country Assessment – Kenya (Nairobi: United Nations, 2000).

showed that nearly 73 percent of the working children in Kenya contributed between 20 and 100 percent of the household income.[56]

It is clear that the prevalence of child labour in Thika cannot be attributed to a single but to numerous factors. Socio-economic and political factors are driving children to work. These factors hinge on the demise of the family structure that respected children and upheld their well-being for the sake of posterity. We have argued that poverty breeds poverty. Children who were working in the various categories came from both large and small households. The economic status of the household in which one was born influenced or determined whether one would be compelled to work and supplement household income. It has been demonstrated that poor parents perceive their children as assets. Globally, the problem of working children and youths is better described as a normal part of the life of the relatively poor in all societies.[57] As documented above, children in Thika and other poor neighbourhoods fit into this framework of being economic assets whose chances in life are determined by the opportunity cost. That is, children are viewed as being of economic value and they make significant contributions to family income. They are therefore a desirable asset for struggling parents. By denying children an opportunity to acquire education, which is a major source of empowerment, children are denied opportunities. Therefore the working children suffer not only from the chronic deprivation and poverty but also the perpetual vulnerability to deprivation. Their premature inclusion into the world of work excludes them from the space of lifetime opportunities and vertical mobility.

Poverty and School Attendance

The role of poverty in keeping children out of school or in child labour cannot be downplayed. As mentioned in the early parts of this chapter, since independence the Kenyan government has made substantial efforts to advance a wider distribution of

[56] Kenya Institute of Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRA), 'Costs and Benefits of Eliminating Child Labour in Kenya' (Nairobi: KIPPRA, Working Paper No. 10, 2003), p.26.

[57] Ben White, 'Children, Work and 'Child Labour', *Development and Change*, 25, 4, 1994, p.851.

educational opportunity. Though intermittently done, the provision of free primary education in 1974, 1979 and 2003 increased enrolment levels in the country. This suggests that cost has a significant effect on enrolment levels. Since the implementation of the economic reforms in the 1980s school enrolment has been on a downward trend. In the 1990s enrolment levels drastically plummeted following the reintroduction of school levies in 1989 under the cost-sharing initiative. With the cost-sharing system, the government's contribution was confined to paying teachers' salaries while parents were required to pay for school uniforms, stationery, textbooks, instructional materials and other school equipment. Parents were also expected to contribute to school construction and maintenance costs through self-help. Since most parents could not meet these costs enrolment has gone down and education has become less accessible to poor families.[58]

Three main reasons were identified for children's preference for work rather than school. First, the introduction of the 8-4-4 system of education,[59] and that of the school fees in 1985 and 1989 respectively have seen enrolment go down. A reduction in government expenditure on education made education expensive and therefore inaccessible to children from poor families. Textbooks were scarce and shared in the ratio of about two or one in a class.[60] Buying schools uniforms and payment of numerous levies was not affordable to all. Subsequently, school-age children were locked out of the education system, particularly in the upper primary level. Second, according to educationists, the 8-4-4 curriculum is overloaded and many students cannot cope. Pupils are taught 13 subjects, nine of which are examined at the end of grade 8, stay in school from 7 am to 5 or 6 pm have extra-tuition over the weekends and have short holidays. Pupils are under too much pressure from the school workload which deprives them of playing time. This affected their motivation for learning.

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[58] Judith Bahemuka, *et al*., 'Child Labour in Kenya: A Critical Analysis' A Paper Presented at the Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour' (Workshop, 27-28 July, 2000, Nairobi).

[59] This is a three-tier system of education that translates into eight years in primary school, four years in secondary and university respectively.

[60] Personal Communication, Jane Ngigi, Ruiru, 3 March 2002.

Subsequently, the performance has deteriorated over the years. Those who are under pressure give up on education and, in the long run, drop out of school.

The other alternative for those who remain in the system is repetition which has become commonplace. There have been cases where students have been held back for up to two years consecutively making them a laughing stock to their peers. Such pupils were perceived as being 'too big' to be in a particular grade or in primary school.[61] Similarly, Mungai's study in the neighbouring Murang'a district found that forced repetition stigmatises the affected girls who cannot fit in socially with the younger classmates.[62] Sometimes repetition was not followed by an improvement in performance. Caught in such circumstances, pupils lost self-esteem and decided to quit school and seek employment which guaranteed them autonomy. Also, cases of sexual harassment and teenage pregnancy were a real threat to pupils in Thika and Kenyan schools in general.[63]

Finally, according to the cost-sharing policy, erecting physical structures and purchasing instructional related materials was relegated to parents and local communities. Many of the parents were not in a position to meet these costs. The lack of capacity of local communities to renovate or put up new schools was mirrored in the physically dilapidated buildings evident in many of the rural schools in the district. The abolition of school fees also coincided with the capture of *harambee* from the top by President Moi (see chapters one and eight). The control of *harambees* by the state isolated the communities in central Kenya who were involved mainly in opposition politics and were therefore not considered in need of development projects. *Harambees* and money raised through communities was insufficient to cover all the necessary costs. Contrary to the 1970s, when Kiambu took the lead in infrastructural development, from the 1980s the provision of essential social services was wanting.

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[61] Personal Communication, Esther Mumbi, Ruiru, 29 March 2002.

[62] Anne Mungai, *Growing Up in Kenya: Rural Schooling and Girls* (New York, Peter Lang Publishing, Inc, 2002), p.62.

[63] Okwach Abagi and George Odipo, 'Efficiency of Primary Education in Kenya: Situational Analysis and Implications for Educational Reform', Institute of Policy Analysis and Research –IPAR, Discussion Paper No. 004/97 (1997) p.15.

The low quality of facilities in school, distance and general discomfort led many pupils to quit school. For instance, the desks were in bad shape and sometimes 60 pupils were squeezed into classrooms suitable for half that number of pupils. The floors were dusty, sometimes without concrete floors making them prone to flea and jigger infestation. The dire lack of facilities made schooling less interesting than the outside world and many pupils looked for the slightest excuse to quit school. This suggests an explanation for the high rates of truancy and poor academic performance in the district in the last two decades. The generally poor conditions could be blamed on the general national economy although politicised ethnicity cannot be downplayed. Finances provided by Plan and Solidarity International, among other NGOs, partly made up for the demise of the state in provision of educational services (see chapter eight).

These and other intervening factors saw enrolment in primary school drop. By 1991, the enrolment of children in primary schools was about 95 percent, but it had started to decline by the close of the 1990s. Most children, mainly between the ages of six and 14, dropped out of school and were working with their families or alone in environments which were often dangerous to their health and overall development. By 1999 the national enrolment rate had reduced from close to percent to 67 percent.[64] In Thika district the primary school drop out rate stood at 5.3 percent in 2002.[65] Sometimes parents advise their children to work during school holidays but the moment children begin working, they rarely return to school. Gradually it turns out to be a normal practice to work and schooling becomes a choice. Table 6.1 shows the drop in enrolment rates between 1995 and 2002.

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[64] *Daily Nation*, 2 April 2003.

[65] RoK, *Thika District Development Plan, 2002-2008* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 2002), p.23.

Table 6.1 Primary Schools Enrolment by Gender in Thika District 1995-2002[66]

Year	Boys	Girls	Total
1995	61,875	61,652	123,527
1996	59,149	58,153	118,032
1997	63,505	58,069	121,574
1998	60,534	59,374	119,908
1999	60,474	59,309	119,783
2000	55,121	56,028	111,149
2001	54,711	54,501	109,213
2002	54,532	54,343	108,874

There was a general decline and fluctuation in enrolment levels in the period between 1995 and 2000. Girl's enrolment was lower than that of boys. This was partly explained by the fact that more girls drop out of school due to early marriage or pregnancy and related factors that have already been mentioned. In addition, whenever family resources were shrinking, patriarchal attitudes and practices, privileged boys even at the family level.[67] In more recent years the situation has deteriorated. In 2002, Thika was among the districts in Central province with the lowest level of school enrolment. For instance, primary and secondary school enrolment stood at 75.3 and 28.3 percent respectively.[68] At the national level, in 2003 statistics from the Ministry of Education showed that of the pupils who had enrolled in standard one in 1996, only 59.8 and 70.7 percent of boys and girls respectively

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[66] The data contained in this table was obtained from the Department of Education, Thika District Office.

[67] April Gordon, *Transforming Capitalism and Patriarchy: Gender and Development in Africa* (London: Lynne Rienner, 1996), p.7.

[68] RoK, Thika District Statistics Office, 2002.

completed standard eight.[69] This suggests that Kenya is not close to making substantial progress in the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), especially in terms of increasing access to universal primary education. In 2003, a closer look at Kenya's potential in the attainment of the MDGs indicated that in regard to achievement in universal primary education (UPE), Kenya has the potential but her monitoring potential is rather weak.[70]

Child labour is a pervasive problem in the world today. Despite the existence and ratification of conventions against child labour, Kenya ranks high among economies in Africa that are driven by child labour. Since the colonial period, practice has shown that, on its own, legislation against child labour cannot stop the employment of children. Poverty and other socio-economic factors underlie the prevalence of child labour. It has been argued that child labour denies children opportunities to acquire life skills that are relevant for a stable adulthood. The households where children are sent to work instead of to school are not oblivious of this fact. However, faced with the dilemma of facing immediate starvation and returns from education, which are not guaranteed, most of the poor households opt to send children to the coffee fields, quarries or to the urban areas to serve as domestic servants. The burden of expenditures required to attend school as well as the loss of income provided to the family by children who are attending school, combine to make education too costly for such families. Working children are denied the opportunity to developing basic skills and capabilities.

Earnings from children are used to complement the income of poor households. Most of the children who were interviewed admitted that they gave their earnings to their parents who spent it on food. Although children were exploited and discriminated against in their places of work, grinding poverty compelled them to stay on. The increasing incidence of poverty in the district has seen children move from formal sectors of the economy where legislation is enforced to the more informal and fluid sectors of the rural economy. The challenges wrought by the HIV/AIDS pandemic

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[69] Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2003 Percentage Completing Standard 8 and 1 of 1996 by District and Gender (Nairobi: 2003).

[70] RoK, *Millennium Development Goals Progress Report for Kenya 2003* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 2003), p. 13.

leading to change in the family structures, signify a bleak future for children born in poor households. Child-headed households are becoming common and the assistance previously extended by other members of the family is rapidly decreasing as more and more families face persistent poverty. Although there is a correlation between child labour and poverty, it can be combated by raising the starvation wages paid to poor households. This will allow children to go to school. Education is a good in itself and a precondition for, though it may not be a guarantee of wider economic and social development. With education the cycle of transgenerational poverty can be broken.

CHAPTER SEVEN

HEALTH AND POVERTY: THIKA UNDER 'SIEGE', 1953-2000

Poverty is a broad concept that encompasses many aspects of life and the physical environment is perhaps the major determinant of ill-health in many low income countries. The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines health as a complete state of physical, mental and social well-being and not merely absence of illness. According to Rene Dubos the real measure of health is not the (utopian) absence of all diseases but the ability to function effectively within a given environment. Hence good health changes with the environment and is a continuous adaptation to the myriad microbes, irritants, pressures and problems of daily life.[1] This definition serves as a point of departure for this chapter.

There is a causal relationship between health and poverty. An increase in poverty in Kenya has resulted to an increase in health challenges. In particular, structural poverty, which has been discussed in the previous chapters, is manifested in high morbidity and mortality in Thika district. Poor sanitation and housing, congestion and lack of potable water which characterise poor neighbourhoods increase the vulnerability of most of the residents of Thika to ill-health.

The government is mandated to provide social services to people as the guardian of the public's welfare. This legitimises its authority and in addition ensures satisfactory health for the population at large. In the case of Kenya the challenge of tropical diseases almost proved insurmountable to the colonial medical authorities. By the 1960s smallpox, tuberculosis (TB), cholera and typhoid had been suppressed to controllable levels. The colonial state's health policies have been pursued in independent Kenya. The discourses of hygiene, sanitation, epidemics, access, equity, affordability and cost-sharing continue to inform health policies. The challenge in the last two decades or so has been that of containing the HIV/AIDS pandemic which threatens to erode any gains made in health in the previous decades.

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[1] Gerard Piel and Osborn Segerberg (eds.) *The World of Rene Dubos*: *A Collection From His Writings* (Rene Dubos Centre, 1990).

This chapter examines the political economy of health care in Thika district. It is organised into four sections. First is an assessment of the availability of health care vis a vis the challenges introduced by the colonial economy. The second section assesses the success of the post-colonial state in providing health care. The third section addresses the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Thika district paying particular attention to the peculiarities that made the residents of Thika susceptible to the disease. Finally, an examination of the accessibility and equity in the delivery of health care is attempted.

Health and Disease in the Late Colonial Period, 1953-1963

In the past a lot of criticism has been levelled at colonial medical policies in Africa. In the case of Kenya, health care services were provided to Africans only to help sustain labour needs. Mburu observes that during the colonial period the existing three-tiered socio-political system was extended to the provision of health care so that the quantity and quality of the health services offered progressively declined from the Europeans through the Asians to the Africans.[2] Wolff shares similar views and points out that lack of adequate investment of the colonial government in health facilities translated into an unhealthy work force for most of the colonial period.[3] To fill the void, in the reserves Africans relied on health facilities that were mainly provided by missionaries. In addition, African traditional therapy played an integral role during the in colonial period.[4]

The colonial government did not consider the provision of health care, particularly for Africans, a priority. Hence health care was underdeveloped in much of the colony of Kenya prior to the 1940s. In a rather peculiar way, Thika, being at the heartland of

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[2] F.M. Mburu, ‘The Social Production of Health In Kenya’, in Steven Feierman and John Janzen (eds.) *The Social Basis of Health and Healing in Africa* (Berkeley: University of California, 1992), p.411.

[3] Richard Wolff, *The Economics of Colonialism: Britain and Kenya, 1870-1930* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), p.131.

[4] See George Ndege, *Health, State and Society in Kenya* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2001).

settler economy was at an advantage in as far as the provision of health was concerned. By the 1950s, Thika enjoyed a relatively developed medical infrastructure. The Thika Civil Hospital (later Thika District Hospital and hereafter TDH) was operational at the end of the 1940s, while the Ruiru Dispensary was opened in 1955 and there were several missionary dispensaries. Private clinics were also provided during the colonial period. In Thika, the challenges that confronted the health department were mainly the frequent outbreak of hygiene-related diseases and congestion in hospitals.

The residents of Thika were under the jurisdiction of the Nairobi County Council (NCC) and were therefore expected to adhere to the sanitation procedures provided by its Department of Health. Frequent inspection of market places, abattoirs and public latrines were part of the surveillance that was observed to stem the outbreak of hygiene-related diseases. Despite these measures, typhoid remained a major health challenge in the settled areas. This was caused by the squalid and appalling housing conditions found on the coffee and sisal estates.[5] Lack of potable water was also associated with water-borne diseases in the East African Bag and Cordage Company (EABC) at Ruiru, an important source of employment in the district.[6]

People in the reserves were afflicted with similar health hazards. Whenever there was an outbreak of a hygiene-related disease, the colonial authorities were quick to blame the Africans for their unkempt and unhygienic environment. Accordingly, public health officers mounted environmental campaigns to clear the dwellings of Africans of rodents and pests. For example, to the colonial public health authorities the prevalence of TB was traced to the smoke-infested huts, the common type of housing for the Africans in the reserves. The situation became worse in the 1950s when the Kikuyu were put into Emergency villages which had limited sanitation.

Thika, being both an industrial and agricultural district had a disproportionate share of migrant labour. Subsequently, its centrality made it accessible to people from the

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[5] KNA/AMC/14/14: Thika District Annual Report 1958.

[6] KNA/DC/TKA/3/26: Thika District General Correspondence 1958.

neighbouring districts of Maragwa, Murang'a, Machakos and Kiambu.[7] Congestion and lack of supplies of drugs and equipment were common problems at the hospital, earning it disrepute from some of the farmers in Ol Donyo Sabuk and Makuyu divisions, who in 1955 described the situation at the TDH as 'disgraceful'. To these farmers patients visiting the hospital were subjected to improper diagnosis, inordinate delays and congestion.[8] Further, a high mortality rate amongst expectant mothers in the 1950s was commonplace in the reserves as well as the settled areas. In one incident, when three cases of perineum infection were reported in the TDH, the Medical Officer of Health came in defence of the situation with the remark that 'one would like to take the midwives to task over this but how can anyone maintain absolute sterility when 103 admissions have to be crammed into six beds, two of which have to be vacated to allow the midwives to examine the antenatal cases on clinic days'.[9] The medical personnel experienced similar problems in their living quarters.[10]

There were also a few successes in colonial health care services. Owing to widespread immunisation and vaccination there was evidence of effective control of most of the infectious diseases, save colds and rheumatism, which were more common during the rainy period. Subsequently, the labour reports of the late colonial period acknowledged that there was no record of loss of productive man-hours occasioned by sickness.[11] Following the introduction of a register system in the late 1950s, a strict follow up of patients was guaranteed. Under the register system, a patient's record made it easier to trace defaulters.[12] Using chiefs and employers, TB patients completed the prescribed treatment and thus foreclosed development of drug-resistant strains. Thus despite the contagious nature of TB it was kept to a manageable level.

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[7]KNA/AF/6/1: Thika Central Executive of Associations 1953-58.

[8] *Ibid.*

[9] KNA/BY/9/243: Thika District Monthly Medical and Sanitary Reports 1955-1958.

[10] KNA/VQ/16/4: Thika District Monthly Reports 1949-1958.

[11] KNA/AMC/14/12: Thika District Annual Reports 1955-61.

[12] KNA/BY/9/243: Thika District Monthly Medical and Sanitary Reports 1955-1958.

The opening of private clinics in the town of Thika served to diffuse congestion at the district hospital. Dr. Njoroge Mungai, President Kenyatta's cousin, was among the first private medical practitioners in the town. Outside the clinics long queues were seen, which was evidence that the residents of Thika were in need of health services regardless of the costs involved.[13] The opening of the Ruiru Dispensary in July 1955 provided some relief for the migrant workers on the estates in the area.

In spite of the increase in both public and private facilities, the issue of access and equity in health remained problematical. In the 1960s the medical reports abound with complaints of inadequate supplies of drugs and equipment throughout the district.[14] In the face of falling supplies of drugs and sometimes food, doctors felt frustrated in their day-to-day duties.[15] Throughout the decade the requisition forms for drugs from the central stores were returned with the remark, '*to follow list'*, which in most instances were not met both in the short-and long-term. To ameliorate the crisis, the district MOH was compelled to seek extra supplies from the Provincial Hospital in Nyeri. This measure was however not sustainable given the large catchment area served by the THD.

Health Care in the Post-Colonial Period, 1963-1983

At independence in 1963, Kenya inherited a health system that was considered by the new government to have many defects. These included, high levels of preventable diseases requiring a sizeable budgetary allocation. To redress these defects the new government adopted a policy of providing free or low cost curative and preventive care services.[16] Both private and government health care facilities jointly fought to control common causes of morbidity.

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[13] KNA/AMC/14/33: Thika District Monthly Intelligence Reports 1956-60.

[14] KNA/MJ/6/12: Thika District Hospital Annual Report 1966.

[15] *Ibid.*

[16] Benjamin Nganda and Germano Mwabu, 'Health and Poverty in Kenya' in Judith Bahemuka,*et al.,* (eds.) *Analysis and Evaluation of Poverty in Kenya* (UNESCO, 1998), p.54.

By the mid-1970s there were glaring regional disparities in the provision of health services. Central Province received a disproportionate allocation of state resources. This was mirrored in the exemplary developed infrastructure in the area. Between 1973 and 1978 Central Province enjoyed the highest share of development expenditure, actually more than twice what it would have received if the money had been distributed according to its share of total population.[17] Nyanza and North Eastern Provinces were the poorest served in terms of development of similar infrastructure. Studies conducted on distribution of social amenities in the 1970s were conclusive that government money was channelled to the most economically and politically powerful districts and provinces in the country. This skewed development can best be understood in the context of politics of patrimonialism by which Thika emerged as a major beneficiary. Through self-help, too, health care provisioning in Thika was further bolstered. A few examples are cited to illustrate this.

To start with, the Gatundu Self-Help Hospital was built in the 1960s through Kenyatta's largesse.[18] The hospital was built of donor funds and those raised through self-help. In the latter case, people who paid homage to Kenyatta in his rural home sponsored the project (see chapter one). Under the auspices of the *harambee* or self-help spirit Kenyans from all over the country invariably made contributions towards the construction of the hospital worth millions of public money. In the 1960s, the facility was one of the largest in the region and served people from the neighbouring districts. The government had to provide staff and a recurrent budget for the facility. Inevitably, the *harambee* development activities meant that some communities would develop and therefore claim extra support from the state at a greater rate than others.[19]

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[17] Arne Bigsten, *Regional Inequality and Development: A Case Study of Kenya* (Farnborough: Gower, 1980), p.156.

[18] Colin Leys, *Underdevelopment in Kenya: The Political Economy of Neo-Colonialism* (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1975), p.248.

[19] Brian Cooksey, David Court and Ben Makau, 'Education for Self-Reliance and *Harambee*' in Joel Barkan (ed.) *Beyond Capitalism vs. Socialism in Kenya and Tanzania* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1994), p.211.

In addition, the expansion of the Thika District Hospital in the 1970s was yet another product of clientelist politics. The first department to benefit from the expansion was the paediatric ward, which received a fillip in 1970 when Kenyatta donated Sh.100, 000 while the local community raised Sh. 105,000 for the same projects.[20] The Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) donated NOK 3.5 million for the construction of a nutrition unit, lecture theatres and a casualty department for the hospital.[21] Also, NORAD provided an architect and personnel to assist in the actual construction. The nutrition unit was used as a lecture theatre to teach mothers about matters of nutrition. It was anticipated that the nutrition unit would also serve as a model for other districts in the country. This suggests that Thika was the ideal model on which other parts of the country's health facilities were to be designed. An additional £235,000 was allocated for the building of a centre for training community nurses and NORAD pledged technical assistance for the next five years.[22] The school of nursing still plays a principal role in the training of nurses. However, in spite of the massive financial support and resource allocation, there was always a shortfall in the provision of health care in the district in the 1970s and the decades to come.

Mere physical expansion did not necessarily translate into effective delivery of health care services in the district. Severe drug shortages, unserviceable vehicles, lack of water and personnel shortages continued to be experienced. There was congestion caused by the squeezing of 40 patients into a ward designed for only seven.[23] Congestion was traced to the centrality of the hospital and the fact that patients with complications were referred to the

[20] KNA/BY/8/381: Thika District Hospital Annual Report 1970.

[21] *Ibid.*

[22] KNA/AMC/14/14: Thika District Annual Report 1979.

[23] KNA/BY/8/381: Thika District Hospital Annual Report 1970.

TDH, although the hospital lacked adequate staff. In fact seven doctors served 35,000 people in 1970.[24] The patients in Thika, like those in other parts of Kenya, had to contend with a chronic shortage of drug supplies and withstand long hours of queuing, sometimes for drugs that were not available. Such experiences sharply contradict the dominant anti-Kikuyu ideology which accuses the Kikuyu of Kiambu of having monopolised the 'fruits of independence'.[25] There was a widespread feeling that the people of Kiambu had an advantage over the rest of the people, including the rest of the Kikuyu in Central Province (see chapter one).

Given that environmental conditions are closely linked to health matters, it is important to note that Thika has a disproportionate share of environmental hazards because of its vibrant industrial sector and a heavy concentration of coffee factories and farms. Indeed, Thika is an epidemiological area on more than one account. Many of the respiratory and water-borne diseases endemic to Thika were traced to pollution and careless disposal of waste matter. There were frequent complaints from the public regarding coffee factories that drained their wastes into the rivers that intersperse the district. The majority of

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[24] *Ibid.*

[25] David Leonard, 'Class Formation and Agricultural Development' in Joel Barkan (ed.) *Politics and Public Policy in Kenya and Tanzania* (New York: Praeger, 1984), p.150.

the rural population relied on these rivers for their water supply.[26] A penalty of Sh. 4,000 was imposed on offenders but this was too low to serve as a deterrent.[27] Closely related to environmental hazards, was the poor sewerage disposal systems and lack of potable water, particularly in the towns of Githurai, Juja and Ruiru. Frequent outbreaks of cholera and typhoid as well as road carnage on the Thika-Nairobi highway were the main causes of morbidity and mortality in this period in the district.[28]

The influx of patients with sexually transmitted infections (STIs) seeking health care in the public health facilities in the late 1970s introduced a new dynamic to the ecology of disease in Thika. In 1977 the Medical Officer of Health decried the rising levels of patients with STIs in the district. He lamented that STIs were uncontrollable and 'I am not wrong to say here [Thika] we are having an outbreak with us of venereal diseases'.[29] Reports from Gatundu Sub-District Hospital echoed similar concerns revealing that 'ever since the closure of private clinics, there has been a marked increase of cases of STIs in this hospital'.[30] Between 1977 and 1981, cases of both gonorrhoea and syphilis reported in the district had doubled, up from an average of 100 per month to close to 200 which the health officers described as 'increasing day in day out'.[31] For instance, in May 1977 alone, about 102 cases of gonorrhoea and three cases of syphilis were treated at the TDH. In 1981, out of 4,875 patients

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[26] RoK, *Thika District Development Plan 1997-2001* (Nairobi: Government Printer 1997), p.38.

[27] KNA/ MA /12/26: Kiambu District Annual Report 1985.

[28] KNA/AMC/14/14: Thika District Hospital 1979.

[29] KNA/AMC/14/5: Thika Division Annual Report 1977.

[30] *Ibid.*

[31] KNA/AMC/15/15: Thika Division Monthly Reports Other Departments 1981.

tested for STIs at the TDH 2,323 were diagnosed with gonorrhoea or syphilis.[32] This trend suggests the prevalence of STIs to have been a precursor to the AIDS pandemic. It can be deduced from Rau and Forysthe's work that the steady rise in the incidence of STIs might have been an early pointer to the onset of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, considering that 'HIV infection probably started to spread in Kenya in the late 1970s or early 1980s'.[33]

HIV/AIDS: A New Challenge to Health Care, 1984-2000

In Kenya the first 'indigenous' AIDS case was diagnosed in 1984.[34] However, Kenya, like most other countries in the developing world, was slow to admit that AIDS was a reality. AIDS was described in the press and by policy-makers as a 'disease of westerners', especially gay men, therefore it was widely but mistakenly believed that such risk groups did not exist in Kenya.[35]

According to Rugalema, the way people talk about the AIDS pandemic reflects their perception of it which, in turn, influences the way they live with it.[36] For instance, to most Kenyans, HIV and AIDS was one and the same thing. Hooper observed that many Kenyans had not witnessed people who were known to them dying of AIDS and they therefore remained unaware of the risk they were exposed to. He also observes that even the local Kenyan nickname for AIDS, *misaada*, (Kiswahili for economic

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[32] KNA/AMC/14/5: Thika Division Annual Report 1977 and KNA/AMC/15/15: Thika Division Monthly Reports Other Departments 1981.

[33] Bill Rau, and Steven Forysthe, *AIDS in Kenya: Socio-Economic Implications* (Nairobi: NASCOP, 1996), p. 12.

[34] Rau, *AIDS in Kenya*, p. 3.

[35] *Ibid*.

[36] Gabriel Rugalema, 'Understanding the African HIV Pandemic: An Appraisal of the Contexts and Lay Explanation of the HIV/AIDS Pandemic with Examples from Tanzania and Kenya' in Ezekiel Kalipeni, Susan Craddock, Joseph Oppong and Jayati Ghoshi (eds.) *HIV and AIDS in Africa: Beyond Epidemiology* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2004), p.193.

aid) had none of the relevance of Uganda's 'slim'.[37] The meaning that was given to AIDS in Kenya could be best understood in the context of her mounting foreign debts and the introduction of structural adjustment programmes (SAPs). Kenya had few domestic resources to devote to combating HIV/AIDS, hence the initial inertia on the part of the government in fighting the new disease. Indeed, there was no political will to provide leadership or commitment towards containment of the pandemic. Despite its economic connotation, *misaada* was a value-laden term that was associated with promiscuity. More importantly, it was judgemental, value-laden and full of condemnation. Kenyan politicians argued that journalists were exaggerating the prevalence of AIDS and playing to deep-rooted Western stereotypes of Africa as a place of disease and promiscuity. Theories that located the origins of HIV in Africa only heightened official defensiveness.[38]

The Kenya government feared that negative publicity would hurt her tourist industry. Reacting to the AIDS-phobia, the then President Moi ordered the isolation of AIDS patients from the rest of the society and called on prison officials to see to it that prisoners with AIDS were identified and isolated from other inmates.[39] This was not strange given Kenya's past record of having voiced similar criticisms against family planning programmes in the 1960s and 1970s. In the absence of leadership from the government, ignorance reigned.

It was only after a decade that signs of a more strategic response were manifested. Since 1990, pregnant women registering for their first visit to an ante-natal clinic (ANC), or surveillance sites were anonymously tested for HIV/AIDS and the results were analysed by National AIDS and STIs Control Programme (NASCOP). Results from most of the sites showed that the HIV prevalence rate was as high as 30 percent

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[37] Edward Hooper, *Slim* (London: The Bold Head, 1990), p. 131. AIDS was initially referred to as 'slim' because of the weight loss, emaciation and frailness that is associated with the disease.

[38] See Hooper Edward, *The River: A Journey Back to the Source of HIV and AIDS* (London: Penguin Books, 2000) and J. Goudsmit, *Viral Sex: The Nature of AIDS* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

[39] *Africa Health*, January 1990.

in Kisumu, Busia and Meru Central districts.[40] Although AIDS was initially presented as an urban problem by the end of the 1990s, approximately 72 percent of those already infected were living in the rural areas.[41] Following the high prevalence rate of the disease, AIDS was declared a national disaster in 1999. Since then the government has adopted a more proactive role in the fight against the pandemic. In the same year, the National AIDS Control Council (NACC) was established. The NACC coordinates resources for the prevention of HIV transmission through the constituency AIDS control committees (CACCs) operating in most of the areas. The specific functions of CACCs include mobilisation of local communities towards promoting positive behaviour change. It is important to note that although 1999 was a benchmark in the government's response to the pandemic, it was too little too late.

The HIV/AIDS Pandemic in Thika

The first recorded incidence of HIV/AIDS victims in Thika date back to September 1986 when a woman from Murang'a and a man from Munyu died at the TDH. Initially, the medical reports exaggerated the number of deaths to seven but tests carried out at the Kenyatta National Hospital (KNH), the largest teaching and referral hospital in the country, confirmed that two people had died of AIDS-related complications.[42] It is significant to note that one of the deceased came from Murang'a district for reasons that will become apparent later in this section. The district health officials ensured that the deceased were interred as per the regulations, which included the disposal of their personal belongings, a practice that was soon to be abandoned as the rate of death from AIDS overwhelmed families, communities and the government alike.

The effects of the initial inertia by the government and the assumption that AIDS was an urban problem became more evident in the 1990s. Statistics from a surveillance site at the TDH revealed that the district, like any other part of the country, was being ravaged by the pandemic. The prevalence rate among pregnant women visiting the ante-natal clinic at the site are shown in table 7.1

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[40] RoK, *AIDS in Kenya: Background, Projections, Impact, Interventions and Policy*, sixth ed. (Nairobi: Ministry of Health, 2001), p.6.

[41] *Ibid.*

[42] *Thika Times*, November 1986, p 13.

Table 7. 1 Rate of HIV prevalence among pregnant women in the Thika Sentinel Surveillance Site, 1990-2000[43]

Year	Prevalence rate in %
1991	3
1992	10
1992	3
1993	28
1994	40
1995	-
1996	13
1997	19
1998	33
1999	18
2000	21

The statistics reported in 1994 and 1998 were startling, more so to the residents of Thika. To many, Thika was geographically located far from what were then considered to be the 'high risk' or *entre*-points of HIV/AIDS, that is, the towns of Mombasa and Busia.[44] Pronouncements from opinion leaders, demonstrated that the disease was not accorded the seriousness it deserved. For instance, in 2000 when Thika district registered a HIV prevalence rate of 21 percent, one of the highest in the country, the Central Provincial Commissioner (PC) wrongly dismissed the figures as an exaggeration arguing that 'Thika District Hospital catered for patients from neighbouring districts as well and the figures were a consequence of improved

[43] RoK, *AIDS in Kenya,* p.6.

[44] *Ibid.*

reporting on the pandemic'.[45] This to some extent is credible but it also serves to overlook the magnitude of the problem at hand. This standpoint of the PC was reinforced by an episode during the launch of the Kamwangi CACC, whereby a self-confessed HIV/AIDS patient was heckled and dismissed as an impostor who had been paid to scare the people present at the meeting.[46] According to a male informant aged 30 years, denial was a significant impediment to positive behaviour change.[47] Many people in the district 'othered' AIDS victims and reckoned that it could not reach them. Youths, in particular, were skeptical of the statistics and the men were more in denial than their women counterparts. Officials working for the African Medical and Research Foundation (AMREF) in the district decried the prevalent level of denial among the residents of Thika.[48]

High levels of denial and politicking undermined efforts to fight the pandemic. The CACCs were belatedly launched in 2000 and 2004 in Kamwangi and Gatundu constituencies respectively.[49] The CACCs are decentralised units designed to mobilise and co-ordinate local communities in the AIDS-related activities. The Thika District AIDS Control Committee (DACC) was only launched in 2002. The section that follows contextualises the changing socio-economic terrain that further illuminates the pandemic in the specific context of Thika.

For many years the epidemiology of AIDS in Africa was associated with truckers and commercial sex workers (CSWs) who were seen as 'vectors of transmission' of the virus. Over the years, AIDS has been conceptualised as a result of 'risky practices'

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[45] *Daily Nation*, 15 July 2000.

[46] *Daily Nation*, 25 September 2000.

[47] Personal Communication, George Waweru, Kamwangi, 12 March 2002.

[48] Personal Communication, Daniel Kiarie, Gatundu, 19 March 2002.

[49] Michael Aliber, Cherryl Walker, Mumbi Machera, Paul Kamau, Paul, Charles Omondi and Karuti Kanyinga (eds) *The Impact of HIV/AIDS on Land Rights: Case Studies From Kenya* (Cape Town: HRSC Publishers, 2004), pp. 73, 74.

and more recently, the concept of 'multiple contingent of risk' has been adopted.[50] The concept of 'multiple contingent of risk' was developed by researchers to encapsulate the multifaceted nature of the life situations of many individuals: unemployment, underemployment and poverty, forced separation from family and kin, lack of access to health services, war and displacement.[51] These views provide a more holistic understanding of the pandemic. The latter two explanations are more encompassing and do not privilege a single cause or certain category of people. In this study, these concepts are used in the analysis of factors that make the residents of Thika susceptible to HIV/AIDS.

The high prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS in the border and coastal towns of Kisumu, Busia and Mombasa in the late 1980s and early 1990s was used to justify the geographical theory but after AIDS had penetrated into interior parts of the country, researchers sought more plausible explanations. Thika's location and the high prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS defied the geographical explanation. It is against this background that the next section situates the pandemic in the specific context.

Thika has a highly mobile population. From the 1920s until the mid-1980s, Thika has had a vibrant industrial sector that was characterised by a heavy presence of agro-processing, chemical and textile industries (see chapter one). Accordingly, it was a major source of employment for migrants from far-flung districts in Nyanza, Western and Eastern Kenya. As is characteristic of urbanisation in the developing world, the residents of Thika faced serious housing problems. An average of 4.2 people shared a room, and many had to leave their families in the rural areas where they returned once a year.[52] The major estates in the town were overcrowded and lacked basic infrastructure.

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[50] Maryinez Lyons, 'Mobile Populations and HIV/AIDS in East Africa' in Kalipeni, *HIV and AIDS in Africa,* p.180.

[51] *Ibid.*

[52] Macharia Kinuthia, 'Housing Policy in Kenya: The view from the Bottom: A Survey of the Low-Income Residents in Nairobi and Thika', *Urban Praxis*, pp.409, 410.

Many of the employers cited a lack of funds to renovate or expand the housing while the Municipal Council of Thika did little to upgrade the estates. Thus by the early 1980s many of the workers lived in appalling housing conditions.[53] Over time the situation has been aggravated by the high rate of migration reported in Thika and other towns in the district. In 1999, Thika registered a net migrant rate of 2.0 percent against a national rate of 1.5 percent.[54] Most of the migrant population is concentrated in the town of Thika which presently has an estimated population of 200,000.[55] Many residents of the town of Thika live in dormitory-style accommodation. This population fluctuates between day and night given that there is movement back and forth from the town daily or at relatively short intervals. The men working in the towns are known to have casual sex relations both in the town and their places of origin. Commenting on this, Mburu observed that 'it is disgusting to see the gross ignorance of many people even after the Ministry of Health gave some guidelines of how to avoid AIDS'.[56]

This was confirmed by one lodge manager who reported that 'these married men give us business. They rent rooms for a short time during the day and at night they return to their wives'.[57] The lodging business seemed not to have been hit by the extent of the epidemic. Indeed, one would have thought the association with the virus and careless sexual behaviour would have seen the boarding and lodging business drop but instead, in 2002, it was observed that in Thika lodges which hired rooms by the hour were no less busy than they used to be before the AIDS pandemic.[58] The

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[53] KNA/AMC/14/20: Thika Division Monthly Reports Other Departments 1982.

[54] UNDP, *Datasheet on Population and Development Indicators from the 1999 Kenya Population and Housing Census Kenya* (New York: UNDP, 2002).

[55] Nina Schuler, 'Case Study to Local Government Responses to HIV/AIDS in Kenya' (World Bank, 2004).

[56] *Thika Times* November 1986, p. 13.

[57] Personal Communication, Gabriel Ndun'gu, Kamwangi, 4 May 2002.

[58] Aliber, *The Impact of HIV/AIDS on Land Rights*, p.73.

opening of Club Vybestar in the town in the 1990s was cited as a catalyst in the spread of AIDS in the district by the majority of the informants. According to a middle-aged man, the club was an infamous social or meeting joint for young girls especially of school-going age, who dated men who were much older than them.[59] This suggests that girls ended up getting hooked up in the sugar-daddy phenomenon.

Thika's textile and agro-processing industries have been a major employer of women.[60] Women were predominantly employed for their dexterity. In the early 1980s Cirio Del Monte (formerly Kenya Canners) remained the largest single employer of women, particularly in the cannery section.[61] Generally Thika district attracts a large number of casual and unskilled labourers and those who do not find employment end up offering sexual services.[62] Migration and mobility leading to concentration of large numbers of unaccompanied spouses in certain parts of the district has created, in the words of Barnett and Whiteside, 'patterns of sexual behaviour and mixing which are perfect for the spread of STDs'.[63]

Thika has different types of sex workers both in the town and the rural areas.[64] The collapse of the agricultural sector in the neighbouring districts pushed many women to the towns to make a living (see chapters three and four). Many of the women who were interviewed exuded confidence that inasmuch as the AIDS 'scare' was real, in 'Thika still has many [men] who will not mind having a woman for a night'.[65] This

[59] Personal Communication, Ali Kariuki, Thika, 14 April 2004.

[60] KNA/MJ/6/16 Health Inspector and Health Visitors Annual Report 1966.

[61] KNA/AMC/15/15: Thika Division Monthly Reports Other Departments 1981.

[62] RoK, *Kiambu District Development Plan 1994-96* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1994), p.101.

[63] Tony Barnett and Alan Whiteside, *AIDS in the Twenty-First Century: Disease and Globalisation* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), p.153.

[64] *Ibid.*

[65] Personal Communication, Carolyne Ndung'u, Gatundu, 23 May 2002.

viewpoint is reinforced by findings of the Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (KDHS) of 2003, which showed the prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS stood at nine percent for men who often slept away from home, and three percent for those who did not.[66] Men who were isolated from their spouses and solicited sex from CSWs were often aware of the risks they were exposing themselves to but this did not stop them from doing so either. CSWs transmitted HIV to their clients, who in turn infected their spouses and girlfriends.[67] In Thika the high turnover of sexual partners drawn from different social groups increased the risk of contracting and passing on the virus.[68] Arguably, migration increases the supply and demand sides of the commercial sex industry, a prerequisite for the pandemic. Similarly, evidence from Eastern and Southern Africa shows that migration formed an ideal milieu in which STIs and HIV spread.[69] That CSWs chose to remain in the oldest profession despite the increasing risks involved underscores the gravity of the economic circumstances in which most women find themselves.

The CSWs were highly mobile and their movements were largely determined by the availability of prospective clients.[70] Thus prostitutes plied their trade throughout the

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[66] RoK, *Kenya Demographic and Health Survey 2003* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 2004), p.225.

[67] Personal Communication, Gabriel Waweru, Kamwangi, 23 May 2002.

[68] Karina Kielmann, 'Prostitution, Risk and Responsibility: Paradigms of AIDS Prevention and Women's Identities in Thika, Kenya', in Marcia Inhorn and Peter Brown (eds.) *The Anthropology of Infectious Disease: International Health Perspectives* (Amsterdam: Gordon and Breach Publishers, 1997); Carolyn Baylies and Janet Bujra, 'Rebels at Risk: Young Women and the Shadow of AIDS in Africa' in Becker, Charles, Dozon, Jean-Pierre, Obbo, Christine, and Moriba, Toure, (eds.) *Understanding HIV/AIDS in Africa* (Dakar: Codesria, 1999).

[69] Wiseman Chirwa, 'Migrant Labour, Sexual Networking and Multi-partnered Sex in Malawi' in Philip Setel, Wiseman Chirwa and Eleanor Preston-Whyte (eds.) *Sexual Networking, Knowledge and Risk: Contextual Social Research for Confronting AIDS and STDs in Eastern and Southern Africa* (Canberra: Health Transition Care, 1997), p. 6 and Maryinez Lyons, 'Mobile Populations and HIV/AIDS in East Africa' in Kalipeni, *HIV and AIDS in Africa,* p.184.

[70] This informant who is a lady aged 30 years was separated from her husband, who was a teacher. Following a domestic quarrel she decided to relocate to Mataara, a tea-growing area where she was found at the time of the interview.

district and beyond depending on where their business could flourish. A self-confessed former prostitute put it as follows: *tuthee twa macani ni tuo turatingia na no nginya tucere mieena iyo* (Kikuyu for it is the old men in the tea zones that have money and hence we must go there).[71] Tea farmers, who received a bonus after every three months, were the main targets since they financed a steady demand for transactional sex.[72] The CSWs were well aware of the risks they were exposed to but held that it was better to die ten years down the line than to die immediately due to starvation. According to one informant, 'death is a human sentence which was irreversible and it did not matter what killed one, since the effect was the same'.[73] Their care-free attitude was premised on the belief that *kuishi ni bahati kufa ni lazima,* meaning that living was considered as a chance compared to death, which was inevitable. Some of the women who were in their mid-20s put it as follows: *haribu jina jenga mwili* (Kiswahili for ruin your reputation, build your body), a cynical reference to the fact that a good name is intangible but sex-for-money brings home the bacon. This can be interpreted to mean that it was for economic reasons that the women took the risks they did.

The inequitable distribution of economic resources was to a large extent responsible for the spread of the pandemic in the district. To the CSWs, trade in sex is not despicable but a survival strategy, that is, *wira ni wira* (Kikuyu for work is work). In my own opinion, the lack of economic opportunities or power condemned the CSWs to the trade as a way of earning a livelihood. They should therefore not be seen merely as villains who are out to spread the disease, but rather as victims of the disease.

Thika proved ideal to both male and female sex workers because of its central location. The following extract from my transcript of an interview elucidates this:

> At the age of 25 years Charity was widowed and HIV-positive. She hailed from Gatundu division and was a hairdresser. Her deceased husband was working as a casual labourer with Premier Bag and Cordage (formerly East

[71] Personal Communication, Esther Nyabari, Kamwangi, 24 April 2002.

[72] Personal Communication, Hannah Kabura, Gatundu, 19 March 2002.

[73] Personal Communication, Agnes Mumbi, Ruiru, 23 March 2002.

> Africa Bag and Cordage Limited). During one of the school holidays, Charity visited her aunt in Ruiru where she met her future husband. The man took Charity to Cravers Inn for an outing and after that they were in constant communication. After attaining her form four education, Charity moved in with the man. Soon thereafter Charity fell pregnant and that was the onset of her health problems. In 2001, she was admitted to the Thika District Hospital with severe pregnancy complications. The man did not have any serious health problems and so Charity associated her ailing health with the pregnancy. After delivering her baby, she was advised not to breastfeed and that is when she started to realise that all was not well. Because of her persistent chest pains and frequent malaria bouts she suspected that she had acquired the deadly virus. She did not go for an AIDS test, instead she left her husband of three years and returned to her natal home. Later she learnt that her husband had passed away in September 2002. Her son looked unhealthy and showed little sign of recovering. During the interview, Charity's aged parents were hesitant to discuss the issue at all. Charity was rather calm and seemed to have accepted her fate. She blamed her deceased husband for having infected her with the virus. She was highly skeptical of his fidelity and suspects that he frequented the numerous illicit brew dens in the sprawling Mucatha slum. She admits that their short-lived marriage was marred by quarrels and brawls. She is also quick to confess that she did not ever imagine that AIDS would befall her. According to Charity, death is imminent and she thanks God for every day that passes.[74]

This presents a case of the high-risk behaviour of many at the margins of the society. Charity blamed her predicament on her husband. She expressed regret for having married a man that she did not quite know well. The level of denial in Charity is reminiscent of othering of the disease common among the residents of Thika. This could be traced to the stigma that is associated with the disease and which influences social relations. The case study also somewhat underscores the centrality of Thika which makes it an epidemiological area.

Further, the central location of Thika made it a stopover for long distance truck drivers in transit from Garissa, Nakuru and Nanyuki towns.[75] Truckers who are known to spend a lot of time away from their regular sexual partners are prone to engage in casual sex. This increases the likelihood of the truckers transmitting HIV to

[74] Only the Christian names are used in the case studies to safeguard the identity of the informants.

[75] KNA/Thika Municipal Council Annual Report 1979, p.6. and Kielmann, 'Prostitution'.

the population in town given that they have sexual contacts in their various stop-overs. As one informant put it, HIV/AIDS is closely linked with safari or journey and should be called *murimu wa thabari* to connote this meaning. In addition, local taxi or *matatu* crew were yet another vulnerable group. The touts who had some money to spend were infamous for luring schoolgirls and women into transactional sex.[76] Touts transmitted the virus as they plied the rural and urban areas where they established casual sex networks.[77]

The coffee plantations are also pockets with high rates of HIV/AIDS infection. Owing to housing problems similar to those experienced in the towns, most of the men working in the commercial agriculture sector left their families in the rural areas. Also, there was a heavy presence of single women on the estates. Cohabitation between the residents of the estates was commonplace. In the absence of recreational facilities, casual sex became a preoccupation for most of the workers, particularly those in the 20-45 age cohort. A study in the 1980s revealed that for women who resided on the estates, casual sex was commonplace particularly on payday.[78] One would expect that behavioural modification would have followed the massive campaigns on the ways to avoid contracting the virus but this was not the case. One of the estate managers who had served on different coffee farms in the last twenty years insisted that indulgence in illicit brews and the abiding casual sex were characteristic of plantation life.[79] Rugalema's study on the commercial estates in the Eastern and Western Provinces of Kenya revealed similar trends and practices of casual sex which served as a catalyst in the spread of HIV/AIDS.[80] Also, there were workers who

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[76] Personal Communication, Waweru Ruba, Kamwangi, 23 April 2002.

[77] *Daily Nation,* 27 February 2002.

[78] Adagala, Kavetsa, 'Households and Historical Change on Plantations in Kenya' in Eleonara Masini and Susan Stratigos (eds.) *Women, Households and Change* (Tokyo: UNUP Press, 1991), p.23.

[79] Personal Communication, Francis Munyua, Ruiru, 25 April 2002.

[80] Gabriel Rugalema, 'HIV/AIDS and the Commercial Agricultural Sector of Kenya: Impact, Vulnerability, Susceptibility and Coping Strategies' (New York: FAO/UNDP, 1999), pp. 30, 31.

commuted daily from their rural homes to the estates. The groups engaged in casual sex and acted as a 'bridge' population between the estates and the neighbouring villages.

The slump in the coffee industry had led to a shift from the use of permanent to casual labour, a measure that had been put in place to keep production costs low. The temporary nature of employment increased the vulnerability of casual workers who were at the mercy of their supervisors and bosses. To circumvent possible layoffs, most women extended sexual favours to supervisors who were predominantly male.[81] Most of the victims of sexual 'predatorship' argued that economic deprivation was not comparable to sexual exploitation. Indeed, most of them did not perceive it as a risk but rather a means to secure a livelihood (*unga*).[82] The desperation of poor women is brought out by Karega's observation that these women were more afraid of losing their source of income than they were of sexual advances made by male supervisors which increased their chances of contracting STIs or even the dreaded virus.[83] Sexual 'predatorship' was manifest in the gendered power relations in the estates and the society at large (see chapter eight).

To the people of Thika, AIDS was more of an urban phenomenon than a rural one. This perception was based on the apparent increase in the incidence of STIs around holiday times, in December when many urban dwellers return to their rural homes. This viewpoint is reinforced by the patterns exhibited in the VCTs in the district. The month of February is normally the peak season for both males and females seeking to know their status.[84] It is adduced that women, in particular, felt insecure and feared that their urban-based spouses may have introduced the virus to them during Christmas and end of year festivities. Again, it was reported that over the same period

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[81] Personal Communication, Martha Wairimu, Kamwangi, 7 February 2002.

[82] *Unga* is a Swahili word for maize meal although it is also used to refer to food in general.

[83] Regina Karega, 'Assessment of Workplace Sexual Harassment in the Commercial Agriculture and Textile Manufacturing Sectors in Kenya' (Report for International Human Rights Fund, May 2002), pp. 17, 19.

[84] RoK, Thika District Hospital Annual Reports, various years.

of time there is an overwhelming indulgence in indiscriminate sex. Between the months of March and August the numbers decline sharply. Evidently, there was an apparent increase in the incidence of sexually infections around holiday times, when many Nairobi dwellers returned to their rural homes.[85] A similar remark could be passed for Thika, which as already mentioned experiences high rates of migration at even shorter intervals.

Another way of looking at the high rate of HIV being reported in the rural areas is that many of the people who fall sick in the urban areas retire to the rural areas where they seek the care of their kith and kin. The rural areas have become homes for people with full-blown AIDS. The urban lifestyle proves hard for people who in most cases have been retired on medical grounds or are not in a position to earn an income due to sickness, especially those who are self-employed. Again in the urban areas the extended family and social capital, which is needed to render care to the often bed-ridden PLWAs, are nearly lacking.[86] Left with no option, the chronically ill resort to rural areas where home-based care is readily provided by friends and relatives. Thus the rural areas record higher percentages of people dying from AIDS-related complications than the urban areas.[87] Zulu *et al.* observe that since many of the earlier AIDS-related deaths in Kenya occurred among urban dwellers who were taken to rural areas to be buried, this shaped rural people's perception of AIDS as an urban phenomenon.[88]

In 2000 the HIV/AIDS prevalence rate among students and staff at the Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT) in Ruiru division was estimated

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[85] Zulu, 'Urbanisation, Poverty, and Sex', p. 168.

[86] Social capital is defined as the power built in relations that pay back to the community or individual in times of need.

[87] Personal Communication, Waweru Ruba, Kamwangi, 23 April 2002.

[88] Zulu, 'Urbanisation, Poverty, and Sex', p. 168.

at between 13 and 12 percent respectively.[89] The ancillary staff were the worst hit by the pandemic. Equally affected by the scourge is the population in the neighbouring towns of Juja and Ruiru where most of the university staff resides. The high rates can be understood in socio-economic terms. The university workers have a stable income which attracts them to the poorly remunerated coffee plantation workers and the unemployed in the neighbouring villages and slums. A similar picture is evident at Kenyatta University and the Thika Barracks In regions with diversified forms of production, mainly tea growing and to some extent dairy farming, the prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS was relatively low. This was probably because people could afford medication and an adequate supply of food.[90] Here, many of the women had alternative sources of income and did not have to rely on transactional sex for a livelihood. Further, as an export crop, tea still earned a substantial income by rural standards compared to coffee (see chapter four). The economic imbalances in economic and social relations played a part in the fast spread of AIDS, as in other developing economies. The salaried staff were at a higher status than the average income earners in these areas. They were therefore a major attraction to the rural women and often end up with serial sex partners. The intrinsic relationship between very poor women and economically empowered men becomes critical in the understanding of the spread of the pandemic in Thika.

The 'contingent risk theory' stresses that the dichotomy of affluence and poverty which are characteristic of Thika, accentuates the spread of the pandemic. In other words, people with a disposable income are as much at risk as those without. This is because of the desperate economic circumstances facing many women in Thika, men who have relatively decent incomes face an increased 'risk' of having multiple sexual partners. Such men have proved to be obvious targets for a woman who sells sex as a means of survival. In the same way regions that have some stable sources of income were equally preyed on by CSWs. Indeed whenever payments are released by the

[89] Japheth Magambo, 'The Impact of HIV/AIDS on the Jomo Kenyatta University of Technology JKUAT' (Report for the Association for the Development of Education in Africa- ADEA, 2000).

[90] *Ibid.*

coffee co-operatives to the farmers there is a predictable migration of CSWs from the main towns in the district to the rural areas. It follows that the provincial administration has to put up an announcement in the local media warning residents of these rural areas to be wary of the 'strangers'. However the extent to which the warnings are normally heeded remains debatable if the high prevalence rate is anything to go by.

By the turn of the century, Gatundu, Kamwangi and Ruiru had the highest levels of HIV prevalence. Kamwangi was the worst hit by the pandemic in 2000. These areas were dependent on revenue from coffee which for a long time had failed to deliver such income (see chapter four). In these divisions, adults in the 24-49 age cohort died in huge numbers leaving behind many orphans.[91] The high prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS in the lower zones of the district contrasted with the low prevalence rates recorded in the upper zones (see chapters three and four). The latter had more sources of income. Another notable feature of AIDS in Thika was that it afflicted girls mainly who had only primary school education.[92] This point of view was highlighted by informants who associated truancy and school drop-out rate with the spread of the pandemic (see chapter six).

Field data confirmed that young girls were involved in sexual relations with men who were much older than themselves for financial gains.[93] The 'sugar daddy' phenomenon as it is commonly referred to, is quite widespread. Cross generational sex is fuelling the AIDS pandemic in Thika. Girls are lured into transactional sex by their peers who are driven by promise of material gains, beyond the reach of their male age-mates cannot afford in many cases. Many of these girls attend college or high school, whilst a small number are drawn from girls in upper primary school. The following account based on an interview with Daisy elucidates the role of material deprivation in compromising the integrity of young girls' control over their sexuality.

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[91] Personal Communication, Hanna Kabura, Gatundu, 19 March 2002.

[92] RoK, Thika District Hospital Annual Report 2003, p. 43.

[93] Personal Communication, Lucy Njahira, Ruiru, 12 April 2002.

Daisy aged 19 years migrated to Thika immediately she completed her 'Ordinary Level' of education in a rural school in Kamwangi division. She acquired grade C which was low to secure her university admission. Her peasant parents sent her to stay with her aunt in Ruiru division. Her aunt was well-off and promised to pay her tuition fees in a commercial college where Daisy was to pursue a course in Clearing and Forwarding. Daisy was enrolled in college in Nairobi in June 2002. She commuted daily between Ruiru and Nairobi, a distance of 30 kilometres. In the evenings and during the weekends she helped in household chores and sometimes had to undertake tasks on the farm. Her aunt often overloaded her with work, denied her pocket money making life unbearable for the college girl. When Daisy informed her mother of her aunt's cruelty she advised her to *vumilia* (Kiswahili for be bear against all odds) given that her siblings were in school and the familial income was minimal. Daisy managed to get a temporary job as an intern in Nairobi and it was at that time that she took a step in live independent of her aunt. One day she decided not to return to her aunt's house but to take refuge in a church, which she converted into a home. Daisy used to spend her day in Nairobi and wait for night fall, take a snack and finally get into the church to catch her sleep on the wooden benches with no beddings. The wooden-church was cold but it was her only home for a period of over one month. She usually left the church compound before dawn just in time to avoid meeting worshippers who streamed in for morning worship. She was not always lucky because at times she was forced to join worshippers during *kesha* (Kiswahili for night vigil).

During her regular trips to college she interacted and flirted with *matatu* (Kiswahili for taxi) crew who 'showed her love'. One day she sat next to a *matatu* driver who asked her for a date after having noticed her as regular customer on the Ruiru-Nairobi route. Daisy never left the man's house thereafter. It ended up in 'marriage' and Daisy was happy to have a home that she could call her own. She ended up living with a man she had barely known for a week. Her internship came to an end and she then became a housewife. The marriage was however short-lived.

After three months of marriage Daisy conceived and quit college. She developed complications and she was bed-ridden throughout her pregnancy. She carried it to term and gave birth to a baby boy. The baby was sickly and needed constant attention but the ailing baby did give Daisy any clue was to what was happening to her own health. After about six months, she lost her baby to what doctors told her was acute pneumonia. Even before she recovered from the loss, Daisy started ailing and was diagnosed with tuberculosis. This was the first time that she sensed that she may have contracted the deadly virus. At the time of the interview, Daisy was almost certain that she had the virus although she had not taken an AIDS test. She looked emaciated but was optimistic of God's healing power. In the last months of 2004 Daisy was sickly with chest pains, diarrhoea and her once glowing skin was covered with lesions. I visited Daisy in January 2005 only to learn that she passed away on 23 December 2004. Her mother who blamed the union between her late daughter and the driver who was said to have died July 2004 (PC, 20 April 2004).

Although Daisy did not know whether she contracted the virus from her former husband or from her clients it is apparent that her initial financial constraints pushed her into the early marriage and premature death. Similar accounts to that of Daisy were presented in different versions but their common theme was economic marginalisation and desperation for survival. This finding is consistent with Zulu, *et al.* observation that in the slums of Nairobi women did not engage in commercial sex in order to obtain luxurious items but was a means of survival in which they secured basic needs such as shelter and food.[94] In this context, then, it is argued that the HIV/AIDS has accentuated the marginalisation and disempowerment of women who are already vulnerable to other socio-economic circumstances. However, this is not to suggest that there are no girls who engage in transactional in order to obtain material rewards.

Marginalisation of women is an indication of the dynamics of power relations in the society but in terms of HIV/AIDS everybody was at risk, no matter their status in society. The relationship of the young girls to their bodies can be seen in the context of powerlessness. Lack of financial power made them more vulnerable as they indulged in unsafe sex. To a large extent the AIDS pandemic in Thika remains more of a woman's problem. This probably explains why medical records showed that in the district more females than males were infected with the virus.[95] This is traced to a lack of access to family resources and the attendant feminisation of poverty that denies womenfolk a chance to control their sexuality. In many cases women compromise their sexuality in their pursuit of their own survival and that of their children.

Further evidence identified house helps as a major 'vector of transmission' of HIV/AIDS in the district. In the majority of the households with working mothers, a housemaid was employed to take care of young children and attend to other

[94] M. Zulu, Nii-Amoo Dodoo and Chika Ezeh, 'Urbanisation, Poverty, and Sex: Roots of Risky Sexual Behaviours in Slum Settlements in Nairobi, Kenya', in Kalipeni, *HIV and AIDS in Africa*, p. 170.

[95] RoK, Thika District Hospital Annual Report 2003, p.36.

household chores. In most cases the maid was treated like any other member of the household. In one such case in Kamwangi division, HIV/AIDS claimed a father and his three sons who contracted the virus from a housemaid whom they had engaged for three years. In 1998 the father who was aged 68 years was diagnosed with the virus. Simultaneously, his son and wife who were based in Nairobi were also reported to have died of AIDS-related complications. The three family members died in 1998, 2000 and 2001 respectively. During the son's funeral which I attended the church minister openly alluded to the causes of the three deaths in the family. This was a radical break from Kikuyu custom in which discourses around sexuality are considered taboo. It emerged that a maid who was working for the son had a sexual relationship with both the father and the son. Whether the sex was consensual or not remained unclear. A similar trend was observed at the national level whereby 18 out of 25 girls aged between 9 and 16 years and working as housemaids were interviewed in depth, 18 of whom had worked in several homes and reported being sexually abused. Most of them were HIV-positive.[96] In many instances, maids were engaged in employment contracts as short as a day or half a day depending on the circumstances. Housemaids are highly mobile, vulnerable to sexual abuse and consequently could be associated with the rapid spread of HIV/AIDS. Evidence of the role of maids in the transmission of HIV/AIDS is suggested by the trend that it is common for maids to marry the men of the homes where they work.[97] This is consistent with Oyekanmi's study of the Nigerian family in the era of HIV/AIDS in which she notes an upsurge of sexual molestation of house helps by males in the homes where they are employed.[98] Oyekanmi goes on to advise women to be more careful in their selection of house helps but the extent to which this is pragmatic remains highly questionable. In modern day Africa the structures of patriarchy and capitalism continue to undermine women's economic and human dignity (see chapter eight).

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[96] US Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2000* (February 2001).

[97] *East African Standard*, 14 April 2003.

[98] Felicia Oyekanmi, 'Socio-Cultural Relations in the Nigerian Family' in Becker, *Understanding HIV/AIDS in Africa*, p. 504.

Even in circumstances where women are not working as house helps the existing gendered power relations undermine the ability of women to negotiate for safe sex. For the great majority of the married women in the villages, the tyranny of the husbands is pervasive. Married women have limited influence over the issue of condoms. Even in cases where spouses are known to have other sexual partners, women are not expected to bargain for the use of condom or safe sex. The submissiveness of women was highlighted in the KDHS of 2003, which showed that at least 75 percent of women thought that they were at moderate risk of getting AIDS because their partners had other sexual partners.[99] This is compared with a marginal 29 percent of men who reckoned that their spouses had multiple partners. It was almost an 'unwritten rule' that it was acceptable for males to have multiple partners, while the same was unthinkable for females.[100] This evidence is reinforced by statistics from the district hospital records which show that of the patients who were diagnosed with STIs and AIDS, a great majority were in monogamous marriages. Indeed, 83.9 and 3.2 percent of the patients diagnosed with STIs were in monogamous and polygamous marriages respectively, while the remaining 12.9 percent were single women.[101] Although the statistics presented here are for a single year and may be biased, they suggest extra-marital affairs and promiscuity.[102] Extra-marital affairs are not peculiar to Thika but the phenomenon is deemed acceptable in most patriarchal African societies which exert pressure on female sexuality and place value on their abstinence from sex.[103] This sexist and gendered bias suggests double standards for males and females.

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[99] RoK, *Kenya Demographic and Health Survey 2003*, p.195.

[100] Most women agreed to their men 'going out' or having extramarital sex but they did not imagine women could do the same because of the penalty this would incur for them. Some said that if their husbands discovered that they were involved in extramarital affairs this would be the end of their lives.

[101] RoK, Thika District Hospital Annual Report 2003, pp.43, 44.

[102] Barnett, AIDS *in the Twenty-First Century*, p.152.

[103] R.McKenzie and G. Tullock, *The New World of Economics: Explorations into the Human Experience* (Homewood: Irwin, 1975), p.58.

Thika district is infamous for the consumption of lethal and illicit brews, the main ones being *muratina* (honey brew), *changaa* gin, *kumi kumi* and *kari kari*.[104] The chiefs and their assistant have been accomplices in the production and consumption of these illegal brews since they protect the brewers who in return paid them a fee or commission.[105] This is more prominent in areas that have in the past been dependent on a single cash crop, for instance coffee, which has been experiencing a slump in the last two decades. For their economic survival people have diversified their source of livelihood by engaging in informal and illegal activities, including beer brewing.[106] Many of the adults who were interviewed agreed that there was a close connection between the illicit brews and the spread of HIV/AIDS in the district. An example from Kamwangi bears this out. In a village christened 'Galilee' that was notorious for *changaa* brewing, a mother used to sell *changaa* and engaged in casual sex with most of her patrons. Her daughter, who was aged 16, also engaged in the trade and they both died within a space of six months. The dynamics of a combination of *changaa* and sex-trade point to the desperate straits attributable to economic marginalisation of women.

Similarly findings from slums in Thika in the 1980s showed that a majority of the regular 'patrons' of *changaa* dens were also regular sexual partners for the women *changaa* dealers.[107] In making a similar argument, Zulu, *et al.* showed that in the Embakasi slum in Nairobi, when a man becomes a patron and he introduces new customers, he is likely to receive sexual favours from the owner of the business.[108] At the national level statistics from the KDHS of 2003 showed that HIV/AIDS

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[104] These terms are used interchangeably to refer to illicit brews, most of the 'brands' cost ten shillings for a mug, which is the unit of measurement hence the term *kumi kumi*.

[105] KNA/AMC/4/15: Thika Division Monthly Reports from Other Departments 1991-93.

[106] Personal Communication, Susan Njeri, Gatundu, 14 December 2001.

[107] Kielmann, 'Prostitution', p.385.

[108] Zulu, 'Urbanisation, Poverty, and Sex', p. 171.

prevalence rate among women alcoholics and non-alcoholics stood at 19 and 9 percent, respectively.[109]

In the past Kenya has reported episodic incidents that can be traced to the use of methanol to increase the alcoholic content and give the consumers a ‘kick’.[110] Once drunk, HIV/AIDS was of little concern to the patrons and the owners of the *changaa* dens, who were mainly women, and they frequently engaged in indiscriminate unsafe sex. Those who sold or consumed illicit brews were a kind of incestuous community and a great majority were HIV-positive. Although disaggregated statistics or hard facts to prove this are not available, it is safe to argue that consumption of illicit brew, which was often associated with abuse of substance, increases the chances of engaging in risky sexual practices. Closely allied to substance abuse was an escalation in sexual deviance among the men who patronise the illicit brew dens. This was mainly reported in Kamwangi and Gatundu divisions which also recorded high HIV/AIDS prevalence rate.

Another feature that accelerated the spread of AIDS in Thika was the escalating rate of rape in the district. During focus group discussions, information was volunteered that demonstrated how rape had become common. Different parts of the district were experiencing an escalation of sexual violence, particularly against young girls. Health records attested to this too. Although statistics on rape are quite scanty, 185 cases of rape were treated at the district hospital in 2003.[111] This figure is conservative given that many cases went unreported owing to the common reluctance of victims to identify their rapists. Stigmatisation of rape victims, as well as of their families, discouraged reporting and this further created room for abuse and violence against children. The incidence of rape increased the risks of the victim contracting the virus because of the use of force and the absence of protection.

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[109] RoK, *Kenya Demographic and Health Survey 2003*, p.227.

[110] *Daily Nation*, 14 April 2005.

[111] RoK, Thika District Hospital Annual Report 2003.

Condom use is often promoted as the lead strategy in the fight against STIs and HIV/AIDS. Although Kenyans boast of an almost universal awareness of the risks of unsafe sex, this is not translated into practice. In the 1970s condoms were marketed as a form of contraceptive and there was resistance against family planning. Similar reception has been extended to the use of condom as a form of protection. Therefore a majority of the informants, especially women were not aware that condoms could be used to offer protection against STIs. To some of the CSWs who were interviewed, the use of condoms or the practice of safe sex was hampered by financial constraints. An extra Sh. 100 or US$ 1.25 was charged for non-use of a condom.[112] Many of the CSWs compared the 'risk' they were exposed to with that of victims of road carnage.[113] Such fatalistic reasoning could not deter or bring positive behaviour modification not only among CSWs but among other sections of the sexually active population. In 1999, it was established that only 12 percent of the sexually active population in Thika used condoms.[114] This trend is worrisome, particularly when it is related to the fact that many of the men in the district admitted to having multiple partners.[115] A similar trend was reported at the national level where only 42 percent of the sexually active male population used condoms in extramarital sexual relations.[116]

The community health workers conceded that condom use was more common amongst single men than married men.[117] This was particularly when they solicited sex from CSWs.[118] Aversion to condoms in Africa is commonplace. In a study that

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[112]Personal Communication, Lucy Kenda, Gatundu, 20 March 2002.

[113] Personal Communication, Purity Nduta, Kamwangi, 4 May 2002.

[114] Aliber, *The Impact of HIV/AIDS on Land Rights*, p.73.

[115] A. Ferguson, M. Pere, C. Morris, E. Ngugi and S.Moses, 'Sexual Patterning and Condom Use Among a Group of HIV Vulnerable Men', Sexually *Transmitted Infections*, 80, 6 (December, 2004), pp.435-9.

[116] RoK, *Kenya Demographic and Health Survey 1998*, p.152.

[117] Personal Communication, Mary Wangui, Ruiru, 15 March 2004.

[118] Ferguson, 'Sexual Patterning and Condom Use' pp.435-9.

was conducted on the Free State Goldfields in South Africa many married men affirmed that using a condom was a sign of unfaithfulness and would therefore not use one either with their wives or prostitutes.[119] In Thika several justifications for not using condoms were provided, a few of which are explored. First, for a long time since the onset of AIDS, condoms were not easily obtained, except from chemists and hospitals. Hence condoms were not readily available for use, particularly where most sexual acts were not planned. Most men admitted that they were aware of the dangers of unprotected sex but often they do not 'think about protection when all you want to get is satisfaction …and only think about it [condom] later'.[120] Second, most men were too embarrassed to request condoms and even more embarrassed to use them. Not until recently have condoms been dispensed in public health centres. At the local health centres the youths who dared ask for condoms were dismissed with words such as: 'Who told you to come here? Which family are you planning'?[121] Indeed, most parents expressed concern that making condoms readily accessible to youths or unmarried individuals would promote immorality and encourage premarital sex.[122] This view point has been stressed by Catholics and Muslims in the country. However, such fears ought to be gauged against the risks facing the youths who are sexually active, a fact that many people deny. Although abstinence and fidelity were popular suggestions from parents and the clergy, these are ideals that cannot be sustained given that AIDS has had a heavy toll on the youths. Finally, there existed various myths and misinformation about condoms. For instance, to a great majority of the male informants condoms diminished pleasure during sexual intercourse.[123] This is

[119] John Luiz and Leon Roets, 'On Prostitution, STDs and the Law in South Africa: The State as Pimp', *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 18, 1 (2000), p.32.

[120] Personal Communication, Humphrey Kamanu, Kamwangi, 24 April 2004.

[121] Nurses confirmed that for a long time they did not provide condoms to youths on the basis of their marital status.

[122] Kiai, W., Kiuna, S., and Muhoro, N., 'The Challenges of Communicating with Female Adolescents: A Case Study of Kenya' in AAWORD, (ed.) *Gender and HIV and AIDS in Africa* (Dakar :AAWORD, 2003), p.63.

[123] This was variously put but can be summarised as: 'you cannot smell roses in a gas mask'; 'you cannot eat sweets in wrappings' and 'how you can put on a rain coat while showering or go swimming in gumboots?', among others.

consistent with the KDHS of 2003 finding which showed that men claimed that the use of condoms reduced sexual enjoyment.[124]

Access to and Equity in Health Care

Following the implementation of economic reforms in the 1980s, the MoH has been chronically under-funded. In 1993, the per capita expenditure was US$3 and this rose slightly to US$5 in 1995 but dropped again slightly to US$4.7 in 2001.[125] Of this amount, more than 70 percent was devoted to salaries whilst expenditure on essential items, particularly drugs and equipment, was kept to a minimum.[126] This had serious ramifications for the provision of health care in the country. Dilapidation of many of the public health facilities, chronic shortage of drugs and equipment, as well as a continuous drift of trained manpower to the more lucrative private sector or overseas, is replicated countrywide although there are regional disparities.

The Kenyatta administration, as was discussed in chapter one and the early sections of this chapter, somehow favoured the Kikuyu on many accounts, particularly in the development of social infrastructure. Similarly, during the Moi presidency, state resources were tilted in favour of the Kalenjin and their close associates. Through the policy of decentralisation and ethnic politics, the Kenyan communities that were closer to the political elite were rewarded accordingly. What follows is a brief analysis of how this created inequality in the provision of health care to the residents of Thika.

Red tape and delays in the disbursement of monies by the Rural Development Fund (RDF) stalled renovations and construction of many health projects in the district.[127] Renovations and expansion at the busy TDH were identified as a priority project for

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[124] RoK, *Kenya Demographic and Health Survey 2003*, pp.203, 204.

[125] RoK, *Economic Survey*, various years.

[126] RoK, *National Development Plan 1994* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1994).

[127] *Ibid.*

much of the 1980s but it was only in the 1990s that spatial expansion was carried out.[128] Similarly, in 1991 the Karatu Health Centre in Gatundu division was earmarked for renovations at a cost of Sh. 7 million but owing to some of the factors already mentioned the facility came to completion only in 2003.[129] Likewise, the construction of a maternity ward at the Ruiru Health Centre took close to 10 years.[130] The Gatundu Sub-district hospital, which owes its origins to Kenyatta' largesse, has declined over the years. Presently the hospital has only four dilapidated wards and the facility lacks essential equipment. To many people in Gatundu, the facility could have become a referral hospital given the correct political connection. In my opinion those who express this viewpoint are making analogies with the Moi University and Referral Hospital in Eldoret, which was upgraded from a district to a referral hospital in 1978, owing to President Moi's influence. Arguably, a rapid increase in population to serve the immediate catchment area led to its upgrading and although similar or more justifications could be provided for Gatundu and Thika hospitals, neither has attained referral status. I tend to concur with Kanyinga, who argues that Central Kenya bore the brunt of neglect due to low political representation in the Moi administration.[131]

This should not be construed to mean that nothing at all was done in Thika in relation to health care. To the contrary, the Ministry of Public Works undertook projects such as Karatu and Ngoliba Health Centres, rehabilitation of the maternity block and staff quarters at the TDH.[132] In addition, between 1994 and 1996 the intensive care unit at the TDH, the theatre and casualty departments were rehabilitated. However, the level

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[128] KNA/AMC/4/3: Thika District Development Committee Minutes 1984-1986.

[129] KNA/AMC/4/5: Minutes of the Thika District Development Committee 1991 and RoK, Thika District Hospital Annual Report 2003.

[130] KNA/AMC/4/3: Thika District Development Committee 1984-86.

[131] Karuti Kanyinga, 'Ethnicity, Patronage and Class in a Local Arena: "High" and "Low" Politics in Kiambu, Kenya, 1982-92' in Karuti Kanyinga, Andrew Kiondo and Per Tidemand (eds.) *The New Local Level Politics in East Africa* (Stockholm: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, Research Paper No. 95, 1994), p. 95.

[132] KNA/MA/12/199: Kiambu District Annual Report General 1973-1994.

of equity and access remained low and disproportionate to the population in the district.

Presently, Thika district has a limited number of public health facilities although it serves a large catchment area. In the past communities were involved in the construction of health centres but in the wake of Moi's capture of *harambee* from the top, local communities have been delinked from active participation in *harambees.* Ngoliba Health Centre project, which was under the auspices of the DFRD, was at one time abandoned altogether owing to a misunderstanding between government officials and the local community. The latter were relegated to mere observers hence they distanced themselves from the project and opted to 'watch as the project progressed.'[133] Furthermore, the construction of the Thika Nyayo Wards, a paltry Sh. 400,000 was collected although the target was Sh. 10 million but the project could not take off owing to suspension of the *harambee* season by the president.[134] The project was belatedly completed in 1997.

Since the demise of the Kenyatta's political power, Thika has been neglected by the Moi government (see chapter one). The Thika politicians were denied state resources for the development of essential social services.[135] Consequently, although it is a referral hospital to the other health facilities in Thika and the neighbouring districts, the TDH requires urgent spatial expansion, experiences chronic shortage of drugs and of trained personnel, all on account of a lack of adequate funding.[136] Although there were clear stipulations on the operations of the DFRD, Moi flouted the statutory obligation as he pleased and dispensed favours to his clients. Towards the end of the Moi era, it was clear that in Kiambu *harambee* activities were in relative decline in the past two decades.[137] Access to resources depended on whether one was

[133] KNA/AMC/4/5: District Development Committee 1991.

[134] *Ibid.*

[135] Kanyinga, 'Ethnicity, Patronage and Class', pp.107, 108.

[136] RoK, Thika District Hospital Annual Report 2003.

[137] Barkan, 'Decentralization and Democratization in Sub-Saharan', p.28.

recognised by the government as an ally or foe in terms of their affiliation to the ruling-party, Kanu.[138] The DDCs turned out to be conduits used by the new governing elite who enjoyed privileged access to state resources which they delivered to Moi's political constituency.[139] As has been examined in the preceding section the case of Thika is captured well by Bayart's observation that the *harambee* spirit was abused to orchestrate a political campaign to ensure the revenge of the Kalenjin over the previously predominant Kikuyu.[140]

Signs of over stretched facilities in the TDH were evident in the early 1980s when a lack of antibiotics to dispense to children in the form of syrup for over five months left nurses with no alternative but to crush septrin or any capsules to make syrups.[141] In an area where pneumonia and other childhood diseases are endemic such shortages proved fatal. In the 1990s requisitions for drugs from the Kenya Medical Services or Central Medical Stores were returned with the remark *nil stock* or *out of stock* which replaced the *to follow list* remark of the 1960s through the 1970s.[142] This translated into chronic shortages of drugs and patients were turned away with prescriptions to go and purchase drugs from private chemists or pharmacies. Regrettably, the economic reforms coincided with the AIDS. The health facilities in Thika district at large are ill-equipped to deal with the high numbers of HIV/AIDS patients in the district.

In spite of lack of equipment, personnel and drugs, the two main district hospitals serve an average of 2000 patients daily.[143] In 2002 the doctor/patient ratio stood at 1:1432.[144] Vaccination in Thika stood at 80 percent owing to intermittent supply of

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[138] Ajulu, Rok, 'Kenya: The Succession and the Prospects of Political Stability in the Post-Moi Era', *Global Institute Dialogue*, 22, 1 (2002), p.3.

[139] Haugerud, *The Culture of Politics,* p.40.

[140] Jean-Francis Bayart, *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly* (London: Longman, 1993), p.51.

[141] KNA/AMC/14/20/49: Thika District Hospital Report 1982.

[142] This is conspicuous in all annual reports from the District Health Annual Reports.

[143] RoK, *Thika District 1997*, p.45.

[144] MoF&P, *Thika Development 2002*, p.62.

vaccines.[145] Upon admission, patients have to provide basic accessories such as syringes, injections and drugs which to an impoverished population sometimes are unaffordable. Moreover, many of the patients lived at least five kilometres away from medical facilities.[146] Fear of patients being sent away with mere prescriptions instead of drugs compelled many people to stay away from health facilities even when their health was failing. Thus ravages of disease compounded by poverty caused numerous deaths in Thika. Some of the diseases which killed the people are curable in circumstances where institutions are functional.

For patients suffering from AIDS-related complications or STIs seeking health in the above mentioned public facilities proved o be a double tragedy. The stigma associated with STIs and HIV/AIDS discourages care-seeking among those who are affected and infected. As was mentioned elsewhere in this chapter, the health seeking behaviour among patient with STIs in Thika was more inclined towards private health facilities.[147] People suffering from AIDS or STIs are subjected to inhumane treatment. This, to Ngugi *et al.* is traceable to a trend in both medical and non-medical circles whereby STIs are often looked upon as self-inflicted problems which ought to remain the sole concern of the sufferers.[148] To date, many people are reluctant to seek treatment for STIs in public health facilities for the same reasons. It is not uncommon to hear nurses callously shouting *wapi huyu mwenye kaswende*? (Kiswahili for where is the person suffering from syphilis or gonorrhoea?).[149] Thus a lack of privacy was cited as the main reason why patients seek alternative health care. Indeed, many of

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[145] Ministry of Finance and Planning (MoF&P), *Thika District Development Plan* 2002-2008 (Nairobi: Government Printer), p.23.

[146] RoK, *Thika District Development Plan 1997-2000* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1997), p.45.

[147] KNA/AMC/14/5: Thika Division Annual Report 1977.

[148] E.N. Ngugi and A.B.N. Maggwa, 'Reproductive Tract Infections in Kenya: Insights for Action from Research' in A. Germain, *et al.* (eds.) *Reproductive Tract Infections: Global Impact and Priorities for Women's Reproductive Health* (New York: Plenum Press, 1992), p.275.

[149] This information was provided mainly by those who were either currently suffering from HIV/AIDS or had suffered a STI in the past.

people resort to private clinics where a certain level of confidentiality is guaranteed while others do not seek medical attention at all. To some extent this may explain why in Eastern and Southern Africa the high prevalence rate of AIDS is associated with the persistence of ulcerating untreated and uncured STIs.[150]

It was also a common practice to send away AIDS patients due to lack of space. During my fieldwork, I witnessed several cases of patients who were almost unconscious being turned back from the hospitals. In 2001, HIV patients occupied a high percentage of bed space in the district.[151] Nevertheless, the way in which AIDS patients were dismissed raised ethical questions. In fact, patients were given a distant appointment in the hope that by the time it came round they would have passed away or will be too sick to seek medical care in a hospital. Under these circumstances many relatives preferred to provide home-based care and save on the cost of going to visit patients at the hospital. The charges of private health providers were so high for the ordinary peasants in Thika that they opted for possible alternatives.

Self-medication was another plausible alternative for those suffering from STIs. Patients could access medicine from licensed pharmacies, shopkeepers, roadside kiosks, and hawkers, which were convenient for many reasons. First, in these outlets, medicine can be sold one tablet at a time, which registered pharmacies are unlikely to dispense. Second, the services offered by the grocery shops are generally quick, the social distance between the provider and the client is reduced, and it is less stressful as traders are usually acquaintances. Third, customers also buy what they want without any prodding. Since a patient undergoes no diagnosis and buys the medicine without disclosing the purpose for which it is being taken the confidentiality and privacy of the patient is guaranteed. Alternatively, one might have to travel a long distance in order to buy medicine or condoms from a shop that is located far away from where one is known by the shopkeeper. We can argue that poverty and lack of access to appropriate health care, poverty and stigma associated with having certain illnesses such as STIs, propagates the sale and use of over-the-counter medication. By 2001 it

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[150]John Caldwell, *et al.,* (eds.) *Towards the Containment of the AIDS Epidemic* (Canberra: Health Transition Centre, 2000), p.20.

[151] RoK, Thika District Hospital Annual Report 2001.

was reported that about ‘70 percent of people who seek medical consultation opting for self-medication with drugs they have little or no information about’.[152] This has led to the development of resistant strains of micro-organisms. This and similar trends should be understood in the context of equity and access to health care for the poor. Lack of money to pay user-fees prevents many poor people from accessing health care which is a basic human right.

Amidst the fall in health care in Thika the areas in the Rift Valley enjoyed the fruits of political patronage. From the 1980s Moi’s Rift Valley Province received a disproportionate share of social amenities.[153] The Keiyo and Marakwet residents, who made up one of Moi’s most loyal constituency, were equally rewarded with ‘visible’ development projects.[154] Similar findings from Brockerhoff, *et al.* revealed that political proximity influenced the availability of essential drugs and the construction of health clinics and hospitals in Kenya.[155] This supports my contention that decentralisation was about attaining new-fangled policies of ‘tribal balance’ that privileged the Kalenjin and other ‘neglected’ ethnic groups.[156]

The situation in Thika cannot be exclusively blamed on the Moi regime and the politics of patrimonialism. Rather, the changes wrought about by macro-economic reforms in the 1980s aggravated the crisis in delivery of health services. Health inequalities are as much a result of the introduction of cost-sharing. The commoditisation of health has caused more inequity than had been envisaged. The policies have favoured the rich and marginalised those who most need public health facilities.

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[152] *Daily Nation*, 9 January 2003.

[153] Joel Barkan and Michael Chege, ‘Decentralising the State: District Focus and the Politics of Reallocation in Kenya’, *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 27, 3 (1989), pp. 449, 450.

[154] Kanyinga, ‘Ethnicity, Patronage and Class’, p.94.

[155] Martin Brockerhoff and P.Hewitt, ‘Inequality of Child Mortality among Ethnic Groups in Sub-Saharan Africa’, *Bulletin of the World Health Organisation*, 78, 1 (2000), pp.33, 34.

[156] David Throup, ‘Elections and Political Legitimacy in Kenya’, *Africa*, 63, (1993), p. 371.

The history and geography of the area increased the vulnerability of most of the residents of Thika to ‘diseases of poverty’. From the colonial period diseases of hygiene such as typhoid, diarrhoea and cholera have continuously ravaged the population. The mechanisms put in place to control the diseases were countered by overpopulation both in the reserves and the settled areas. Since independence, the post-colonial state has been confronted with major constraints in delivery of effective health care services. The indigent bore the brunt of the cost-sharing measures introduced in 1984 and the measures put in place to safeguard the very poor were massively abused by the public and medical personnel. Even with cost-sharing the efficiency that was envisaged remained far from being realised. Instead the supply of drugs and essential services remained inadequate while shortage of qualified personnel continues to be experienced. The challenges faced by the residents of Thika in the past are replicated in the 21st century.

The residents of Thika have been exposed to the rapid spread of HIV because of the peculiar factors that pertain to the area’s history and geographical location. Of significance were the high migrant labour and the concomitant fluid nature of transactional sex pervasive in the district. The part-and full-time CSWs were traders like any other and there was no way of isolating them whatsoever. They justified their trade and safeguarded each other’s identity. In addition, government inertia and underrating of the HIV risk, early sexual activity, multiple-partnerism and minimal condom use compounded the crisis. The distance between town and country has been reduced by a good road network that allows the linkage between different areas. The heavy presence of a migrant population provided a ‘bridge’ population that made Thika highly susceptible to the spread of HIV/AIDS. The dichotomies of affluence and poverty conspicuous in the district fanned the pandemic. Myths and misinformation played a significant role in derailing efforts to control the spread of HIV/AIDS. HIV/AIDS is indubitably linked to poverty. How much one spends on health, what one eats and the stress that one has to endure determines how one lives with the virus.

Any successful campaigns to combat the pandemic lie in addressing poverty and putting in place institutions that are supportive of the victims. Given the economic underpinnings that impel people to engage in what is considered risky sexual practices behavioural change is difficult where the socioeconomic environment is inappropriate for that change.

Since the health facilities in the district were inadequate to cope with the pandemic as well as the other causes of morbidity, it is critical to ensure that the multiple factors that fuel the spread of HIV/AIDS are addressed collectively. The peculiar role played by migrant populations, the availability of disposable income and the closeness of the hinterland and the town have been highlighted. The same factors can be used to enhance the containment of the pandemic. The way to success lies in a close coordination between the government and other stakeholders. The challenge is to ensure that prevention efforts targeting women and young people are scaled up, as preventing new infections has proved to be the most cost-effective means to stem the spread of HIV/AIDS.

CHAPTER EIGHT

STRATEGIES OF POVERTY ALLEVIATION IN THIKA DISTRICT, 1953-2000

In the previous chapters we have demonstrated that poverty is persistent and pervasive in Kenya in general and Thika in particular. This is despite the efforts made by the government to fight poverty. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other development partners and agents, too, have played a significant role in the struggle to end poverty. At the local level, communities and households have developed various coping mechanisms and escape routes to evade poverty. Coping strategies can be defined as a set of actions that aim to manage the costs of an event (shock) or process that threatens the welfare of some or all of the household members. Using coping strategies communities seek to sustain the economic viability and sustainability of their livelihoods.

This chapter discusses the various mechanisms put in place to combat poverty in Thika. The chapter is organised into four sections. Section one traces the policies that have been adopted by the post-colonial state in the fight against poverty. The second section investigates the role of NGOs in poverty-stricken communities. The third section explores the dynamics of poverty reduction at the community level paying particular attention to gender relations in community development. Finally, an evaluation of ways in which households cope with poverty is attempted.

The Role of Government in Poverty Alleviation

In this section we focus on the three major assaults on poverty. These are the Sessional Paper No. 10 of 1965, the Fourth National Development Plan of 1979-93, and *Sessional Paper No. 1 of 1986 on Economic Management for Renewed Growth.* The independent government inherited a country that was impoverished. The colonial economy had a dual structure. On the one hand, there was a rich white settler class that occupied much of the high potential agricultural land and controlled key sectors of the colonial economy. On the other there was a low-productivity commodity agriculture sector providing a livelihood for the African majority at barely subsistence level. Available data shows that at least 18 percent of smallholders in Central Province were living below the poverty line at independence.[1] Subsequently, one of the main preoccupations of the independent government was to increase indigenous participation in the monetary economy, and to promote ownership and control of productive assets. The government envisaged that the economy would grow at a high rate that would allow the benefits to trickle down to the lower classes.

Evidently, poverty alleviation strategy was enshrined as a priority area in the policy documents produced after 1963.[2] The government envisaged to control poverty through two broad strategies, that is, rural development and the creation of employment. In 1962, 92 per cent of the population lived in the rural areas, and the subsistence sector accounted for more than a quarter of gross domestic product (GDP).[3] Moreover agriculture was for a long time the mainstay of Kenya's economy which explains the rural bias in Kenya's development planning.

The first attempt to tackle poverty was outlined in the Sessional Paper No. 10 of 1965, often referred to as Kenya's economic blueprint, in which the government promised to reorganise and mobilise resources in a concerted assault on poverty, disease and lack of education in order to achieve social justice, human dignity and economic welfare for all.[4]

In the translation of policy into practice, the government embarked upon massive land transfers under the auspices of the Million Acre Scheme and other settlement schemes. The government facilitated the transfer of land by providing loans to

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[1] Republic of Kenya (RoK), *Economic Survey of Central Province Survey 1963-64* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1968).

[2] Manda Kulundu, Mwangi Kimenyi and Germano Mwabu, *A Review of Poverty and Anti-Poverty Initiatives in Kenya* (Nairobi: Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis –KIPPRA-2000), p.43.

[3] Francis Stewart, 'Kenya Strategies for Development' in Tony Killick, *Papers on the Kenyan Economy: Performance, Problems and Policies* (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1981), p.77.

[4] RoK, *Sessional Paper No. 10 on African Socialism and its Application to Planning in Kenya* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1965), p.1.

Kenyans to purchase whole farms as individuals or groups (companies or co-operatives) from the departing white settlers.[5] This strategic measure was intended to provide employment and generate some income for the settled families. But it is clear that the land redistribution process benefitted the political and economic elite, thereby accentuating the process of class differentiation amongst the Kikuyu of Kiambu (see chapter two). The successes of this project, particularly in as far as Thika district is concerned was uneven as was shown in the preceding chapters. The novel ideas of African Socialism were implemented only to a limited extent. This is mainly because the emergence of class interests masked an inequitable distribution of resources among the different ethnic groups. Subsequently, poverty has continued to increase over the past decades, though unproportionally in the different regions.

Through 'Kenyanisation' of land, industry and civil service, the dual economy that had been inherited was neutralised to some extent. Although a black elite replaced the white settlers there was some benefit to Kenyans albeit such gains were unevenly distributed, with the Kenyattas and the Kikuyu elite emerging with the lion's share (see chapter one). Another way of promoting rural development was the Special Rural Development Programme (SRDP) which operated between 1970 and 1976.[6] The SRDP did not go beyond the pilot stage as a result of management problems traced to the Kenyatta administration. Nevertheless, Kenya's economic development was at its best in the first decade. Revenues expanded and expenditures were kept in check. Between 1964 and 1973 real GDP grew at 5.9 percent, whereas average domestic prices rose by 3.4 percent annually.[7] Public expenditure for capital formation directed to the agricultural sector was larger than in the industrial sector. The government and public marketing agencies also supported agricultural production through research and extension as well as infrastructural development. In particular the returns from the coffee boom of 1977 enabled the state to improve its engagement in the provision of

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5 Shem Migot-Adhola, 'Rural Development and Policy' in Joel Barkan and John Okumu (eds.) *Politics and Public Policy in Kenya and Tanzania* (New York: Praeger, 1979), p.162.

6 Ian Livingstone, *Rural Development, Employment and Incomes in Kenya* (ILO/JASPA, 1981), pp.17-19.

7 RoK, *Economic Survey 1973* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1973).

basic services and to some extent enhance its legitimacy.[8] The period between 1960s and 1970s was indeed the golden age of Kenya's economy but this is not to suggest that poverty was not prevalent. Inequality did exist but the grinding poverty of later decades was unprecedented.

A dearth statistics inhibits a comparison of the poverty levels in different periods. But from the scanty and fragmented evidence it is undisputable that since the 1970s a trend of a rapidly deteriorating poverty situation in the country was evident.[9] Although different methods of data collection were used and different poverty lines were drawn, there is a consensus that by 1974 poverty was widespread in both urban and rural areas. Smallholders, the landless, the working poor and the openly unemployed constituted a majority of the poor. The first attempt to estimate poverty in Kenya was made in 1974 during the Integrated Rural Survey I (IRS I). It showed that 3.7 million Kenyans were living in poverty.[10] The poor were identified as smallholders who had little cultivable land, a low level of education and who relied less on non-farm incomes.[11] Also, the survey noted the continuing inequality in the country. For instance, it was noted that per capita real income among the lower 40 percent of the smallholder population of Central Province was constant while that of the other income groups increased substantially. The low level of development was traced to a number of factors, particularly the oil crisis of 1973 and the concomitant decline in the real rate of growth from 6.6 percent to less than 2 percent.[12] Thus, the regional disparity in the distribution of poverty and inequality in income distribution proceeded unchecked.

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[8] Joel Barkan, Expedit Ddungu, Alex Gboyega, John Makumbe, Rwekaza Mukandala, and Njuguna, Ng'ethe, 'Decentralization and Democratization in Sub-Saharan Africa' (Occasional Papers 45-49, International Programs, University of Iowa, 1998), p.17.

[9] Kulundu, *A Review of Poverty,* pp.7,14.

[10] RoK, *Integrated Rural Survey 1974-5* (Nairobi: CBS, 1977).

[11] Paul Collier and Deepak Lal, *Poverty and Growth in Kenya* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 1980), p.13.

[12] Francis Mwega and J.S. Ndungu, 'Explaining African Economic Growth Performance: The Case of Kenya' (IDRC May 2002), p.15.

Another onslaught on poverty was embodied in the fourth National Development Plan of 1979-83. In the Plan the government expressed dissatisfaction with the economic growth in the country, particularly the inequitable distribution of wealth between various classes and regions. The government's attention to poverty was drawn by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) study in the country in 1972. The ILO mission observed that although Kenya had experienced an impressive rate of growth in the previous decade, the problems of unemployment and poverty continued to affect the majority of the population.[13] The mission identified the landless, the working poor and female-headed households as those who bore the brunt of poverty. The mission recommended the redistribution of resources and income earning opportunities throughout the economy.

Accordingly, using the 1979-83 Development Plan the government embraced principles of equity through generation of employment and redistribution. This was the first direct attempt to address the twin problems of unemployment and inequality in formal planning. The agriculture sector was to be revamped through the provision of credit, extension, marketing and transport services to farmers. It was reckoned that the sector would absorb most of those seeking employment and provide income for those living on the margins of the economy. Further, the Plan advocated decentralisation and creation of cottage industries in the rural areas. With these strategies the government targeted an economic growth rate of 7.4 percent rising from the previous percentages of 6.3 and 6.7 in the first and second National Development Plans, respectively.[14]

From the foregoing it is clear that at the policy level there was a commitment from the government to mainstream the poor in the planning process. However, the Plan was notably silent on the crucial issues of access to the high and medium potential lands in the Rift Valley and Coast Provinces which could sustain much larger populations than they did at that time. When President Moi took over in 1978 he had promised to look into the issue of putting a ceiling on land ownership which had not been addressed in

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[13] ILO, Employment, Incomes and Inequality: A Strategy for Increasing Productive Employment in Kenya (Geneva: ILO, 1972), pp.73-81.

[14] RoK, *National Development Plan 1979-83* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1979).

the fourth Development Plan. In addition, he had promised to 'investigate the feasibility' of introducing a land tax. As has been demonstrated in chapter two these promises were never delivered, making land an emotive issue in contemporary Kenya.

The implementation of the plan was constrained by several factors. First, the Kenyan economy remained largely untransformed and heavily dependent on agricultural commodities whose prices were highly volatile. The fluctuation in the prices of coffee and tea particularly in 1975 would have crippled the Kenyan economy were it not for the high rate of growth registered in the preceding years that cushioned it (see chapter four). Second, the changes in the international economy caused Kenya deficits in her balance of payments. For instance, during the oil-induced crisis of 1973 the prices of imported oil products rose by 61 percent while those of exports increased by a dismal 30 percent.[15] The economic shocks compelled the government to restructure the domestic economy and cut down on non-essential imports while the price of oil was increased in order to reduce domestic consumption. These changes were reflected at the micro-level where cases of deprivation continued to increase.

In 1974 the Thika district Community Development Officer (CDO) reported that his office was not in a position to adequately deal with the escalating cases of distress. The distressed were in need of food, clothing and sometimes specialised treatment which was sought at the KNH [Kenyatta National Hospital].[16] He bemoaned the budgetary allocation to his office which was a meagre Sh.300 per annum and therefore inadequate to cover all the necessary costs. To ameliorate the situation he managed to obtain 19 cartons of pigeon peas from Kenya Canners which he eagerly distributed to the destitute cases coming mainly from Juja and Ruiru.[17] Further assistance was obtained from the Municipal Council of Thika (MCT) and the District Officer (DO) who collectively organised various fundraisers, among them, a flag-day, jumble sale, membership dance and grand sale of Christmas cards to finance charity

[15] See Killick, *Papers on Kenyan Economy*.

[16] KNA/AMC/14/17: Thika Division Monthly Reports Other Departments 1974-76.

[17] *Ibid*.

projects in the district.[18] This formed the basis of future relief assistance and handouts for the poverty-stricken in the district.

Rural poverty afflicted the residents of Ruiru division who in the mid-1970s were in dire need of food. In 1974 a chief in Ruiru division decried the rising cases of distress amidst an insufficient budgetary allocation to cater for them all.[19] Similar incidents abound in the district. This implies that barely a decade after Kenya's independence poverty was both a rural as well as an urban problem. The vision of a society-free from want and exploitation as envisaged in Kenya's economic blueprint was far from being realised. In the face of limited state resources the local government appealed to private companies to complement their efforts to obtain relief supplies for the affected members of the society.

Further government efforts to address poverty were embodied in the decentralisation policy introduced in 1983 under the auspices of the District Focus for Rural Development (DFRD) strategy (see chapter one). The principles of spatial and institutional deconcentration of resources were implemented with novel objectives but the politics of patrimonialism prevented their realisation. As has been demonstrated the strategy became a conduit for the Moi administration to gain political leverage. This was manifested in an unprecedented increase in the flow of resources to the areas which were allegedly 'neglected' by the Kenyatta administration. Subsequently, the marginalisation of the Central Province which was purported to have benefitted from the previous regime was an obvious consequence of clientelist politics.[20]

Another notable aspect of diversification of the Kenyan economy was the harnessment of the informal sector which had exhibited potential for creating employment and income for both the urban and rural poor.[21] Although the ILO's

[18] KNA/AMC/14/5: Thika Division Monthly Reports Other Departments 1977.

[19] KNA/AMC/14/8: Gatundu Divisions Annual Reports 1974-75.

[20] Frank Holmquist and Michael Ford, 'Kenya: Slouching Towards Democracy', *Africa Today*, 39, 3 (1992), pp.97-111.

[21] ILO, Employment, Incomes and Inequality, pp.229, 230.

recommendation that the government put a stop to official harassment of the informal sector artisans was not immediately realised, the 1980s witnessed strategic changes in this sector. For example, the sector received a fillip in 1985 when President Moi visited the Kamukunji (Nairobi) area, a hub of *jua kali* (Kiswahili for hot sun) activities. This was a landmark event in the development of the informal sector as it was followed by the construction of shades for the *jua kali* artisans and the inclusion of the *jua kali* sector in future development plans. In 1986 Kenya adopted the *Sessional Paper No. 1 of 1986 on Economic Management for Renewed Growth* which was cognisant of the importance of the informal sector. The Paper stipulated that stimulation of the informal sector was to result from macro-economic policies such as the strategy to raise farm productivity and income tariffs and encourage the substitution of labour for machinery.[22] The Paper encouraged people to form *jua kali* associations and to approach banking institutions for credit facilities. The sector was re-discovered and embraced by the government and other development partners. The Sessional Paper on Small Enterprise of 1992 was pivotal in confirming the importance that *jua Kali* attained in Kenya's development agenda. The Paper highlighted the missing link in Kenya's micro enterprises and made recommendations to various ministries on how to empower the artisans.[23]

In spite of these efforts by the government to stem poverty, the situation was grim. Amidst the macro-economic crisis caused by mismanagement and a changing international economy, poverty levels escalated especially in the later half of the 1990s. The Welfare Monitoring Survey (WMS) of 1997 showed that poverty affected at least 3.7 millions in 1972 but had skyrocketed to 11.5 million in 1994 and 12.5 million in 1997.[24] By 2001 poverty afflicted at least 56 percent of the 30 million Kenyans.[25]

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[22] RoK, *Sessional Paper No. 1 of 1986 on Economic Management for Renewed Growth* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1986), p.55.

[23] Kenneth King, *Jua Kali Kenya: Change and Development in an Informal Sector 1970-95* (London: James Currey, 1996), pp.14, 17.

[24] RoK, *National Development Plan 2002-2008* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 2002), p.27.

In response to escalating poverty levels the government established the Poverty Eradication Commission in 1999. Its original task was to oversee the implementation of the National Poverty Eradication Plan (NPEP) which had been drawn up in line with demands of the World Summit for Social Development (WSSD) of 1995. The Summit mandated the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to 'organise the United Nations system's efforts toward capacity building at the local, national and regional levels and to support coordinated implementation of social development programmes through its network of country offices'.[26] Accordingly, the NPEP proposed a fifteen-year time horizon to fight poverty while also striving to make some achievements in the realisation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Some of these programmes have been discussed in the relevant chapters.

The most recent assault on poverty was Kenya's preparation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) in 2001. At the behest of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Kenya prepared the PRSP although she does not qualify for debt relief as she is not categorised as one of the highly indebted poor countries (HIPCs).[27] The primacy of the PRSP framework lies in the attainment of the twin objectives of economic growth and poverty reduction. Economic policies and strategies earmarked for implementation under the PRSP fall within a three-year macro-economic framework aimed at promoting robust economic growth and poverty reduction. The PRSPs have been seen as a voice for the poor or as a veil for structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) and cannot deliver many from poverty. In a way the PRSPs are a one-size-fits-all model from the international financial institutions (IFIs) and remain suspect in as far as poverty eradication is concerned. It is noteworthy that the success of this strategy in Kenya cannot be gauged since it is still in the early implementation stages.

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25 *Ibid.*

26 Principle 1 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development.

27 Paul Kimalu, Nancy Nafula, Manda Kulundu, Germano Mwabu and Mwangi Kimenyi, 'A Situational Analysis of Poverty in Kenya' (Nairobi: KIPPRA 2002).

In the absence of a strong political commitment to bring about reforms, the policies to combat poverty have, at best, remained mere blueprints that were never translated into practice. A civil service that was beleaguered by corruption stifled the implementation of some of the most prudent policies that would have tackled the twin problems of unemployment and poverty. Most of the civil servants were political appointees who deliberately interfered with the delivery of services as well as the implementation of development plans.[28] Therefore most of the directives were aborted even before they were implemented. As O'Brien states, in the past Kenya has proved to be more efficient at articulating policy reforms than implementing them.[29]

Drawing on the analysis in the previous chapters there was little that the people of Thika could applaud the government for. Over the years they became poorer and poorer. They lacked the capability to live a decent and healthy life. There was little that could be expected from a cash-strapped government, save the infrequent welfare or relief assistance interventions administered by the government during famines. Caught between poverty and a government that offered minimal assistance the communities relied on NGOs for relief. In the section that follows we explore the NGOs activities in the fight against poverty in Thika.

The Role of NGOs in Poverty Alleviation

The World Bank defines NGOs as 'groups and institutions that are entirely or largely independent of government and characterised primarily by humanitarian or co-operative, rather than commercial objectives'.[30] For our purposes, NGOs are loosely defined as organisations that are not representative of the government, are voluntarily formed and are involved in charity work. The organisations can be broadly

[28] John Cohen, 'Importance of Public Service Reform: The Case of Kenya', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 31, 3 (1993), p.467.

[29] F.S. O'Brien and T. Ryan, 'Kenya: A Mixed Reformer' in D. Shantayan, D. Dara and T. Holmgren, (eds.) *Aid and Reform in Africa* (Washington, DC, 2001), p.34.

[30] World Bank, *Operational Directive on NGOs*, No.14.70 (Washington, D.C., August, 1989a).

categorised as Northern Non-Governmental Organisations (NNGOs) which have support and financial backing from the western donors, and the Southern NGOs which are based mainly in Third World countries.

In the last two decades or so there has been a proliferation of NGOs working with grassroots organisations, particularly in the Third World countries. Years of authoritarianism and highly state-controlled economies culminated in the general impoverishment of the masses. The ever widening gap between the promise and the reality of how the state functioned, and its inability to change the situation of the poor and the weak in any meaningful way, lent itself easily to a major critique of the very function of the state.[31] In the case of Africa, the state has been associated with mismanagement, corruption, nepotism, repression, dirigisme and authoritarian rule.[32] It is against this backdrop that NGOs mushroomed and to some extent permitted capacity building, participation and engagement of the local communities. NGOs can therefore be seen as a form of alternative development filling the gap created by the retreating state, particularly in service delivery.[33]

In most cases NGOs are multipurpose and they simultaneously engage in voluntary, charity, community or relief work. Notably, the NNGOs have integrated indigenous knowledge and practices in their operations. That is, NGOs are localised in their approaches to different contexts and this synergy is the greatest of the strengths of NGOs. Owing to the multipurpose nature of NGOs and the integration of their activities with those of other grassroots organisations there are overlaps between their goals and functions. Often the functions and operations of NGOS tend to conflate.

Since the 1980s, NGOs have become an integral part of the development process of Thika district. This is not unique to Thika but it is a reflection of a national picture

[31] R. Tendon, 'Riding High or Nosediving: Development NGOs in the New Millennium' in Deborah Eade and Ernst Ligteringen (eds.) *Debating Development* (London: Oxfam, 2001), p.46.

[32] See H.S. Marcussen, 'NGOs, the State and Civil Society', *Review of African Political Economy*, 23, 69 (1996), pp.405-435.

[33] Susan Dicklitch, *The Elusive Promise of NGOs in Africa: Lessons from Uganda* (London: Macmillan Press, 1998), p.3.

where amidst the shrinking role of the state in the provision of essential services, the NGOs have become service providers.[34] In the next section we focus on NGOS and their initiatives in the provisioning of health care services.

Plan International (hereafter Plan) is a NNGO which has its origins in Sweden. Plan is a non-religious, international humanitarian development aid organisation which works with grassroots organisations. Plan has been in Thika for the last 13 years during which time it has profoundly transformed the livelihoods of some people in Thika district. In Ruiru, Kakuzi and Thika divisions Plan has become a household name. The object of Plan is to provide people with the opportunities and tools with which to improve their own situation and eventually empower them. The projects in which Plan are involved range from those in health care, education, water supplies and other initiatives in rural development.

In health care, Plan has been involved in the training of community health workers, (CHWs), traditional birth attendants (TBAs), and the training of trainers (TOT) in the administration of anti-retroviral treatment. Between 1998 and 2000, the Ruiru and Juja Farm Health Centres received essential clinical equipment from Plan whilst it also carried out renovations at the Ngoliba Health Centre. The provision of health infrastructure supplemented the floundering health care services at a time when the AIDS pandemic had over stretched the existing health facilities in the district.

In the marginal areas of Gatuanyaga and Ngoliba, Plan assisted poor families to construct decent houses and ventilated improved pit (VIP) latrines. The latter helped keep in check the frequent outbreaks of cholera and typhoid in these areas. Also, it is on record that Plan facilitated the supply of potable water to the residents of many of the residents of Thika through its umbrella ‘water tank’ project. Through the project many households, particularly, in Nyacaba (Ruiru), Ngelelya (Kakuzi) and Gatuanyaga (Thika) had acquired water tanks of appreciable sizes which they used to harvest rainwater. The successes of the initiative was reinforced by the existence of

[34] See Julie Hearn, ‘The ‘NGO-isation’ of Kenyan Society: USAID and the Restructuring of Health Care’, *Review of African Political Economy*, 75, 25 (1998), pp. 89-90.

strong rural networks through which Plan channelled funds, and which will be discussed under the context of women's groups.

These development projects were, however, received with misgivings by the host communities. It was apparent from Plan officials that some members of the community declined the material support accorded by Plan and claimed that the initiative was sinister although they did not quite substantiate this. Suspicion and mistrust caused serious rifts between the recipients and non-recipients of Plan's assistance. Such misgivings about the motives of sponsors and indifference might suggest scepticism towards the role of the NGOs amongst the local community and might point towards the untoward effect of connection between foreign aid and neo-imperialism. The differences notwithstanding, a majority of the residents of Thika most of whom benefitted directly or indirectly expressed gratitude towards the role of the NGO in their respective areas.

Through the Bamako Initiative (BI) the residents of Thika, particularly those who lived far from public health facilities, were able to access drugs from community pharmacies. The BI was introduced in 1987 by the United Nations Children's and Fund (UNICEF) to strengthen public health care to help communities cope with the withdrawal of government subsidy in health services. Through the BI, communities in Thika had access to over-the-counter-drugs and anti-malarials, treated mosquito nets and HIV/AIDS education.[35] The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) was a major sponsor of the BI in Thika. Through the initiative the local community was empowered to fight malaria and other hygiene-related diseases. With the BI people who lived far away from the health centres were able to access medical care without having to travel for long distances which contributed, albeit in a modest way, to the attainment of equity and access to health care services in the district.

Besides the provisioning of the health care services to patients suffering from HIV/AIDS, Thika district had many NGOs dealing with HIV/AIDS-related projects. The Liverpool HIV/AIDS Prevention and Care (HAPAC), Pathfinder, World Doctors,

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[35] The residents of Kakuzi division were beneficiaries of the Bamako Initiative particularly the subsidised anti-malarial drugs and nets.

African Medical and Research Foundation (AMREF) and the University of Nairobi (UoN) run various projects in the district. In diverse but congruent ways these NGOs are involved in provision of services in the following areas: training of health personnel in administration of antiretroviral (ARV) drugs and prevention of mother to child transmission (PMTCT) of HIV/AIDS, home-based care (HBC) and training of counsellors and health managers.[36] The activities of the NGOs are integrated with those of grassroots organisations as is exemplified by a few of the community-based HIV/AIDS-support programmes.

As already discussed in chapter seven, the ravages of HIV/AIDS threaten to tear apart the family fabric in the district. The increasing disintegration of social capital has seen the sick and the weak in dire need of social and psychological support. The extended family which cushioned people against disasters in the past is no more while the continuous increase in orphans, widows and destitute overwhelms other family members who are already overburdened financially and physically. Again, the tendency to break away from the extended family creates a void. This void has been filled by NGOs which provide invaluable services to those infected and affected by the pandemic. The Kenya AIDS-NGOs Consortium (KANCO) coordinates over 680 NGOs dealing with AIDS in the country. Thika is replete with some of these NGOs. Commenting on the heavy presence of NGOs in the district, a development officer had this to say 'in the district we are reaping the benefits of the negative publicity that Thika received in the late 1990s because of a high prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS'.[37] NGOs have established a mutual relationship with the numerous grassroots initiatives or community-based organisations (CBOs). Using local resources and funding from NNGOs, the CBOs aggressively mounted campaigns against HIV/AIDS in the district. Communities have benefited hugely from the work of local troupes, drama, puppets, poetry and theatre. Among the main groups are, Ruiru AIDS Awareness Group, (RAAG), Thika AIDS Awareness Group, (TAAG) and Youth against AIDS

[36] RoK, Thika District Hospital Annual Reports Various Years. The report is a compilation of all medical records from other public and private health facilities in the district.

[37] Personal Communication, Ali Kariuki, Thika, 14 April 2004.

Programme (YAAP). An examination of one of these groups serves to illustrate this point.

The Integrated AIDS Programme (IAP) which is representative of such NGOs is one of the CBOs dealing with the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Thika district. The IAP was established in 1997. It has its headquarters in Kamwangi division, which in 1998 had a prevalence rate of 33 percent.[38] The IAP is funded by the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD). The IAP operates from Mang'u dispensary which is also run by the Catholic Church. The IAP accords assistance to the very destitute. The CBO works in close liaison with the local communities who present the people affected and infected by the pandemic and in need of IAP's assistance.

The activities undertaken by the IAP include provision of food (sorghum, porridge, beans and vegetables to the patients), counselling and treatment of their clients. The team has some trained counsellors who normally educate local communities about the concept and practice of HBC. The volunteers are committed to providing home-based care (HBC) to patients, particularly in cases where negligence by relatives is reported.

According to one of the volunteers, 'the CBO was based on Christian principles of love and mercy'. He expressed their duty as being one to 'ensure that we express love to these often-neglected people. It is a call to community service, which we have gladly accepted'.[39] In the course of fieldwork, I had cause to participate in some of the activities. HIV/AIDS patients are treated for opportunistic infections and for those who could not make it to the dispensary home visits were organised.

In the absence of adequate medical care in the public sector, the CBO has significantly improved the livelihoods of otherwise desperate cases. Local residents are full of praise for the IAP for its efforts in assisting destitute cases. The youths and old alike, showed readiness to voluntarily provide services in HIV-related initiatives which reflected societal cohesiveness in times of crisis. People had realised that there are no boundaries with HIV and the uncertainty that HIV/AIDS creates made people

[38] RoK, *AIDS in Kenya: Background, Projections, Impact, Interventions and Policy,* Sixth Ed. (Nairobi: Ministry of Health, 2001), p.6.

[39] Personal Communication, Alex Gitu, Kamwangi, 20 February 2002.

aware of a need for support groups, a far cry from the stigmatisation mentioned in the previous chapter.

The IAP sought to influence the people to change their sexual behaviour. The group visited schools and sensitised the youth as to safer sex practices. They emphasised abstinence, a fundamental principle in the Catholic faith, but advised those already infected to use condoms. Through seminars, workshops, theatre, puppet shows and general advocacy, the IAP has had a positive influence on the youths. Following the safe sex campaigns, some of the volunteers insisted that there was a change in people's behaviour. Although it is difficult to authenticate the claim owing to the nature of the available statistics which are highly unreliable there may be some iota of truth in it. As was mentioned in chapter seven, in the district HIV prevalence rate stood at 33 percent in 1998 and this had dropped to 18 and 21 percent in 1999 and 2000 respectively.[40] This claim was further reinforced by the observation that there was a reported increase in condom use amongst the youths mentioned in the previous chapter.[41] Condoms were dispensed in social places and during regular HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns organised all over the district. For example, in 2003 the world AIDS-week was celebrated in the whole district and climaxed on World AIDS Day when 3,000 people attended an open assembly or *baraza*.[42] Also, the annual agricultural show, the youths' exhibition and health field days were used as platforms to educate people on HIV/AIDS. In 2003 a two-day youths' exhibition attracted over 5,000 people and 6,000 condoms were distributed to them.[43] In addition, workshops were organised for factory and estate workers in the district. Cumulatively 250,000 people were reached in 2003.[44] This was regarded as a positive step in the bigger struggle against the invisible yet devastating pandemic. I observed first hand that the strategic prevention measures have gained momentum only in the last few years.

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[40] RoK, *AIDS in Kenya*, p.6.

[41] Personal Communication, Mary Wangui, Ruiru, 4 April 2004.

[42] RoK, Thika District Hospital Annual Report 2003, p.25.

[43] *Ibid*.

[44] *Ibid*.

Another remarkable assault on the pandemic was launched by the *Wendani Munyitanirie* Integrated Health Services (WEMIHS) stands for 'unity in participation'. This CBO was predicated upon the concept of community participation and empowerment. The CBO focuses mainly on creating awareness of the HIV scourge, counselling and rehabilitation of vulnerable groups who comprise women, youths, children and People Living With AIDS (PLWAs). WEMIHS organises workshops and seminars for training of trainers, provides HBC and voluntary counselling and testing (VCT) services. WEMIHS provides a forum for advocacy for children's rights and Orphans and Children made Vulnerable (OVC) by HIV/AIDS. The NGO is a centre of hope for the people in the Kiandutu and Kiangombe slums where it provides a day-care centre, a school feeding programme, education support and vocational skills training. Similarly, the Kiganjo AIDS Orphans Support Group in Gatundu division is involved in placement of orphaned children in schools, counselling, handcrafting and recreational activities. Through the use of drama and traditional dances the rural communities are involved in the mobilisation and learning of the dangers of unprotected sex. Similar groups were replicated in most parts of the district and to a large extent they complement other initiatives operating in the district including those dealing with agricultural development.

Since the 1980s agricultural extensions services were on the decline due to withdrawal of government subsidy (chapters three and four). The frequent food shortages and perpetual food insecurity have pushed many households to deeper levels of food poverty over the last one decade. It is against the suffering of the households that the World Vision Kenya, Plan International, IFAD, Famine Early Warning Systems (FEWs) and Sustainable Agriculture Community Development (SACDEP) have embarked on campaigns to enhance development of sustainable agriculture in the district. [45] Through interventions such as the training of farmers, provision of high-productivity inputs, and provision of extension services, among others some appreciable levels of agricultural production have been realised. The new technology includes the use of the new Tuber Cut (TC) bananas, pannar hybrid maize and *mafuno* fertilisers which local communities have embraced with much

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[45] RoK, Thika District Department of Agriculture Annual Reports various years.

enthusiasm.[46] In the past Plan has provided farmers in Nyacaba and Kimuchu areas, with three super money-maker irrigation pumps. The farmers who benefitted from the project were able to grow vegetables for subsistence and commercial purposes. This enhances the tapping of available resources. Under the auspices of the World Vision Kenya the Kakuku Community Development project had raised their maize production from half a bag to 15 bags per acre.[47] It was within the strategic plan of the World Vision to raise the production of beans from quarter bag per acre to 8 bags by 2007. Going by the past performance there is a possibility that this target may be realised. It also proves that there is potential that is untapped in the district particularly in the so-called marginal areas (see chapters two and three).

The Role of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in Coping with Poverty

Different definitions are given to self-help groups. Among the common ones are: spontaneous associations or groups[48], peasant organisations[49], self-reliant groups and self-help NGOs.[50] The main characteristics of these associations are concern for the welfare of others. In many cases voluntary organisations are driven by a desire for self-improvement and personal advantage. In this study a self-help group is defined as a voluntary organisation or association constituted by members with common

[46] The people in Kakuzi division have been most eager to accept the maize which they associated with increased yields and this certainly guaranteed their food supply.

[47] The World Vision Makuyu Area Development Programme 1996. The reports show that provided local communities with inputs and encouraged the growing of cow peas. It was recognised as one of the important food security crops that can be used to overcome food shortages in the marginal areas. It has been particularly successful in the Kakuzi division. Here production climbed from 39 bags in 1999 to 93 bags 2000. Such an increase was welcome to a community where food shortage was chronic.

[48] Philip Mbithi and Rasmus Rasmusson, *Self Reliance in Kenya: The Case of Harambee* (Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1977), p.13.

[49] Mary Kinyanjui, 'Peasant Organisations and the Democratisation Process' in Mahmoud Rodmane and Sam Moyo (eds.) *Peasant Organisations and the Democratisation Process in Africa* (Dakar: Codesria, 2002), p. 310.

[50] Frank Matanga, 'Non-Governmental Organisations, the State and Politics of Rural Development in Kenya with Particular Reference to Western Kenya' (Ph.D. Thesis, Rhodes University, 2000), pp.30, 31.

interests with the aim of improving the living standards of its members. In this section we will focus on women's groups as a form of self-help initiative.

In pre-colonial Kenya the spirit of mutual assistance was embedded in most of the societies, as is the case in most African communities. The spirit of self-help is found in the languages of many ethnic groups in Kenya; for example, the Luo call it *konyri kende*, the Luhya call it *Obwasio*, the Kikuyu call it *ngwatio*, the Kamba call it *mwethya* and the Maasai call it *ematonyok*.[51] The groups were organised around specific age sets and functions. For instance, Kikuyu women have traditionally engaged in cooperative efforts for purposes of cultivation and harvesting. These groups were locally referred to as *ngwatio* or collective cultivation. This cooperative spirit was carried over into other aspects of their lives such as *matega* (Kikuyu for pooling resources) which was a custom in which women would bring firewood and other supplies to a woman during childbirth and other similar social functions such as weddings and funerals. During the colonial period social change and transformation disrupted such traditional structures although they remained resilient.

Modern day self-help groups can be traced to what Claire Robertson calls 'proto-type' associations found in Kikuyuland in the 1940s. These were associations that were formed by a few European women with the intent of training African women in spinning and weaving.[52] However, in the 1950s the welfare associations were used to gain political leverage for the colonial administration. Accordingly, the colonial administration co-opted the associations to cement government loyalty under the Emergency conditions. Subsequently, the *Maendeleo ya Wanawake* Organisation (Kiswahili for women's progress herein MYWO) was promoted and to date it remains the main women's body in the country.

For the most part, the groups were fashioned to counter the Mau Mau and the nationalist movement in general. To achieve this, women were preoccupied with domestic lessons in order to keep them away from providing supplies to the Mau Mau

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[51] Mbithi, *Self Reliance in Kenya*, p.13.

[52] Claire Robertson, *Trouble Showed the Way: Women, Men and Trade in the Nairobi Area, 1890-1990* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), p.248.

fighters. As Berman puts it the rehabilitation efforts were intended to reconstruct the Kikuyu society and bring it back on the 'high road to progress and modernisation civilisation'.[53] Women were thus enjoined to form clubs which were organised by Community Development Assistants (CDAs). These groups were formalised through their mandatory registration with the Ministry of Culture and Social Services (MoC&SS) unlike in the pre-colonial period where they can be said to have been informal. What ensued was a proliferation of spontaneous welfare and voluntary associations in Central Kenya in the mid-1950s. These groups were affiliated to the MYWO. This was the beginning of a new assertiveness on the part of women.[54]

Initially, the self-help groups were started with the primary objective of meeting basic needs and membership was mainly based on kinship ties. Over the years there has been a transformation in membership and functions of these groups. In the mid-1960s, self-help groups were engaged in collective cultivation of the farms of the members, as well as providing hired labour on the large holdings. Women in a certain locality formed a specific group and collectively cultivated their plots on a rotational basis. In 1966 an estimated number of 6,529 women were involved in collective cultivation in Kiambu district.[55] Among these were, the Chania Kurima Women's group and the Mitero Women's group which were hired by the coffee planters to cultivate their farms.[56] These efforts by women's groups can be contextualised as a rudimentary means through which women were able to retain control of their work and its products.[57]

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[53] Bruce Berman, *Control and Crisis in Colonial Kenya: The Dialectic of Domination* (London: James Currey, 1990), pp.361, 362.

[54] Audrey Wipper, 'Equal Rights for Women in Kenya', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 9, 3 (1971), p.432.

[55] KNA/MC/11/46: Kiambu District Department of Agriculture 1966.

[56] Patricia Stamp, 'Kikuyu Women's Self-Help Groups: Towards an Understanding of the Relation Between Sex-Gender System and Mode of Production in Africa', in Claire Robertson and Iris Berger (eds.) in *Women and Class in Africa* (New York: African Publishing House, 1986), p.27.

[57] *Ibid.*

Further, the groups were involved in poultry and bee keeping, market gardening and handcrafting. Through these associations women shared and promoted their common interests, mainly due to their disadvantaged position in society. The earnings from these myriad activities were expended on their households. The *matega* groups purchased utensils, bedding, grade cattle, water tanks and furniture. The revolving savings enabled members to acquire items which they could not afford to buy on their own.

Another notable characteristic of the women's groups was their involvement in the purchase of agricultural inputs. Following the collapse of the coffee co-operatives (chapters three and four) the SHGs purchased fertilisers and hybrid seeds in bulk and distributed them to their members.[58] With the earnings accrued from farm and non-farm activities women were able to transform rural livelihoods. For example, most women's groups are today remembered for having replaced the common grass-thatch to corrugated iron sheets, earning them, the name *mabati* (Kiswahili for corrugated iron sheets) groups. In 1974 the MoC&SS recognised the efforts made by the *mabati* groups in 'making living conditions more favourable, comfortable and hygienic'. [59] The ordinary women who did not have a major source of income became heavily reliant on the SHGs for soft loans in what was referred to as 'merry-go-round' or revolving fund.

By the early 1970s, Kikuyu women's customary age-grade organisations had developed into self-help groups with new functions overlaying the old.[60] The dynamic and flexible nature of the women's groups ensured their survival amidst changing circumstances. The groups were variously referred to as *ngwatio, mabati, nyakinyua* and *matega* owing to their continuous change in structure, functions and impact on communities. Dynamism was the strongest point of the women's groups. In a very loose continuum women's groups have evolved from *ngwatio* to *matega* and to *gitati*,

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[58] RoK, *Kiambu District Development Plan 1979-83* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1979), p.37.

[59] KNA/MG/11/7: Kiambu District Annual Report 1974.

[60] Stamp, 'Kikuyu Women's Self-Help Groups', p.27.

the latter will be discussed shortly. These groups have been used as a poverty coping mechanism in the last three decades or so. With increased productivity, gradually most of the women's groups expanded their operations to non-agricultural sectors. For instance, some opened up textile or grocery shops in their own farms or started petty trading in the neighbouring towns.

Women's groups received a boost from celebration of the UN Decade for Women, 1975-1985 which was held in Nairobi. The conference mandated the MYWO to organise women's activities and there was a marked increase in the attention that women's groups were accorded by overseas agencies. The 1980s saw the women's groups movement undergo major transformation and diversification.[61] This was facilitated by an influx of NGOs and donor agencies through which funds were obtained and channelled to development projects in which women were major players.[62] The women's groups in Central Province had leverage over those in other parts of the country given their strong grounding in traditional society and proximity to political power. In her tribute to women's groups in the region Stamp observes that the Kikuyu women expressed a remarkable entrepreneurial spirit.[63]

In Thika, women's groups involved those who felt marginalised by the capitalist economy. From our analysis in the previous chapters, it is clear that women had no control over land, the main source of livelihood and they were also relegated to the periphery of formal employment. Through women's groups, they gained entry into the capitalist economy where they earned their own income while not compromising their dignity and gender roles. The women's groups effectively incorporated grassroots women in the development process and made them actors in social change

[61] Audrey Wipper, 'Women's Voluntary Associations' in Margaret Hay and Sharon Stichter (eds.) *African Women South of the Sahara* (Harlow, Essex:Longman Scientific & Technical, 1995), p.174.

[62] Feldman Rayah, 'Women's Groups and Women's Subordination: An Analysis of Policies Towards Rural Women in Kenya' *Review of African Political Economy*, 10, 27/28 (1984), pp.67, 68.

[63] Stamp, 'Kikuyu Women's Self-Help Groups'.

initiatives.[64] In more than one way the group initiative promoted members vertical and horizontal empowerment. That is, once the living standards of women themselves received a boost by extension those of their families and the community at large benefitted too.[65] In the 1980s, the groups were expanding their horizons to get involved regularly in professional clubs and their activities involved higher capital outlays.

Their activities included projects in the transport business and real estate management which were mentioned in chapter one. The Nyakinyua Women's Group formed a company with over one thousand members and bought a coffee farm in Ruiru division.[66] The landless and landed poor from the high population density parts of Kamwangi division were settled on the farm.[67] Other self-help groups have been involved in purchasing of farms within Central and Rift Valley Provinces.[68] This was not peculiar to women in Thika alone as evidence from elsewhere showed that agricultural co-operatives and other self-help groups in Kenya were raising capital to purchase or lease land for food production in light of the difficulty women had in securing title or land as individuals.[69] In the Western and Eastern Provinces of Kenya, women's groups have continued to play a leading role in improving the socio-economic status of women.[70]

The women's groups created employment for non-members who were recruited to work on their farms, drive their buses, sell their merchandise or build their rental

[64] Kinyanjui, 'Peasant Organisations', p.312.

[65] KNA/AMC/15/15: Thika Division Annual Reports 1981-82.

[66] April Gordon, *Transforming Capitalism and Patriarchy: Gender and Development in Africa* (London: Lynne Rienner, 1996), p.97.

[67] Personal Communication, Magdalene Toho, Ruiru, 20 May 2002.

[68] KNA/AQ/5/111: Makuyu Presidential Probe Committee 1987.

[69] Jean Davison, 'Who Owns What? Land Registration and Tensions in Gender Relations of Production in Kenya', in Jean Davison (ed.) *Agriculture, Women and Land: The African Experience* (Boulder: Westview, 1988c), p.172.

[70] Matanga, 'Non-Governmental Organisations', p.189.

houses. The Mwitithia Women's Self-Help and Kiga self-help group are exemplary in the district in this regard. It is clear that more women were involved in self-help group activities than men. The phenomenal success of women's groups in Kenya has been traced to many factors. As mentioned earlier many women have been subjugated by patriarchy and capitalism for so long that they have had to devise ways to escape from situations of misery and deprivation. This begs the question of why women are pro-active in the self-help groups.

Although women fought alongside men in the Mau Mau war and the independence charter promised to develop an egalitarian society, they soon realised that *uhuru* (Kiswahili for independence) brought nothing substantial for them. The post-colonial state propagates economic policies that continue to confine women to the margins of the economy, be it formal or informal. Moreover, the state continues with policies that permit uneven access of men and women to resources to escape poverty. Firstly, domestic activities hinder women from acquiring an education and so few are in formal employment.[71] The government has continually failed to involve them in the functioning of the political, economic and social institutions. Therefore self-reliance remains the most obvious way for women to escape from structural poverty. It is the means to attain self improvement and empowerment. Secondly, through self-help Kikuyu women are breaking away from the yoke of patriarchy. In the Kikuyu community women are not bequeathed with property except in the case of death of their husbands. Even then, there are squabbles with the in-laws who do not readily relinquish property to their sisters-in-law.[72] For women it is a question of struggle against the forces of capitalism and those of patriarchy. As a suppressed force and voice, women, in the words of Kabira and Nzioki, 'see themselves as the only source of power for their own advancement'.[73] In the formation of the self-help groups,

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[71] Wipper, 'Equal Rights for Women in Kenya', p.431.

[72] See Michael Aliber, Cherryl Walker, Mumbi Machera, Paul Kamau, Charles Omondi, and Karuti Kanyinga, *The Impact of HIV/AIDS on Land Rights: Case Studies From Kenya* (Cape Town: HRSC Publishers, 2004).

[73] Wanjiku Kabira and E. Nzioki, *Celebrating Women's Resistance: A Case Study of Women's Group Movement in Kenya* (Nairobi: African Women's Perspective, 1993), pp.77, 78.

women therefore broke away from age-old-custom that limited their upward mobility. Thirdly, the vibrancy of women in self-help groups can be traced to the traditional Kikuyu division of labour framework. In the Kikuyu community, as with most African communities, rights and responsibilities within the household were defined by gender, age and seniority. [74]

In regard to land ownership, women had only user rights and not legal ownership, a preserve of their male counterparts. Indeed the titling of land enhanced the status of men who could control the land as well as the proceeds made from the coffee crop. Whilst women cultivated the farms and picked the coffee, the returns were pocketed by men who spent it outside their families, as will be adduced from a few examples. During a drought in 1983 men would not permit women to collect maize, fertiliser or other agricultural inputs from the co-operative societies–debt stores–to be deducted from the next coffee sales.[75] Yet women worked on the farms and they felt short changed. Thus they devised ways and means through which they could earn their own income or obtain inputs, and this fanned the spirit of pooling resources through *matega.*

Presently, women's groups are playing the role of reinforcing and rearticulating patriarchy among the peasantry to accommodate the changing demands amongst the peasantry. They facilitate women to achieve their own personal improvement as well as that of their own families. Groups also provide women with a chance of gaining some independence, changing their status from recipients of male earnings to contributors to the household kitty.[76]

Unlike women, men could qualify for loans using land as collateral. Confronted with financial hardships, women accessed lump sum amounts of credit from their respective groups sometimes at zero interest. It was uncommon in Thika district for a

[74] Jeanne Koopman, 'Women in the Rural Economy: Past, Present and Future', in Hay, *African Women South of the Sahara,* p.6.

[75] Stamp, 'Kikuyu Women's Self-Help Groups', p. 28.

[76] Kinyanjui, 'Peasant Organisations', pp.310, 311.

woman not to belong to a SHG no matter how meagre their contributions were. Indeed women's groups are considered a way of life for most women without which they could not survive.[77] If a woman had withdrawn from a SHG due to inability to pay her dues in the group she felt very powerless and others considered her very poor.[78] Women politely declined to join a group if they anticipated that it would put them in financial difficulties or cause them embarrassment. In as much as women's groups empowered women it was also a source of ridicule for those who defaulted.

The Kikuyu women provide food to their households, a role that was engrained in traditional society.[79] To cope with the burden of providing, women have had to take on increased subsistence as well as cash-earning activities to meet their productive and reproductive responsibilities.[80] In addition, women's entrepreneurial spirit was driven by their individual and collective acknowledgement that there was male bias in legal rights, office holding, distribution of resources and that the state is typically more responsive to male concerns than those of women.[81] Moreover, most women were of the opinion that high levels of alcoholism and drug abuse among men placed the responsibility of providing food and other basic necessities for children on women's shoulders.

Beyond the provision of food, women took it upon themselves to educate their children. Most women firmly believe that education opens doors and offers the opportunity to break the cycle of poverty (see chapter six). More importantly, female-headed households constitute at least 36.7 of the households in Thika district.[82] In the

[77] Personal Communication, Sophie Kariuki, Thika, 5 February 2003.

[78] Personal Communication, Alice Nyambura, Ruiru 23 April 2002.

[79] Susan Abbott, 'Gender, Status and Values Among Kikuyu and Appalachian Adolescents' in Thomas Weisner & Candice Kilbride (eds.) *African Families and the Crisis of Social Change* (Westport, Conn: Bergin and Garvey, 1997), p.99.

[80] Betty Potash, 'Women in the Changing African Family' in Hay, *African Women South of the Sahara,* p.73.

[81] Gordon, *Transforming Capitalism*, p. 90.

[82] RoK, *Thika District Development Plan 2002-2008* (Nairobi: Government Printer), p.8.

absence of formal employment most women who were absorbed in the informal sector economy relied on school fees loans from their respective women's group. Through women's groups the female folk have proved resilient in the time-honoured task of service to their families.[83] The admirable commitment with which women uphold self-help groups is remarkable. The self-help groups are built on trust, kinship, autonomy and commitment. [84]

Finally, as already alluded to, women's groups work in close liaison with NGOs and this enables them to play an important role in the identification, implementation and evaluation of the projects that are urgent and of immediate benefit to the local communities. Water projects, cattle dips, dispensaries, education institutions, and clinics in Thika partly owe their establishment and completion to the vibrant self-help initiative prevailing in the district. The Kiwanza-Maboloni dip, Mamba Club, Kaithanini, Kakuku Salvation Army, Nyakiambi Poultry Group, Komo Self-help Group and Gaciku Women's Club located in different parts of Thika district have left a mark in the lives of their members.[85]

Moser notes that class, race, ethnicity, age and patriarchy have been determinants in the involvement of women in the attainment of practical gender needs.[86] The struggle of women to achieve self-realisation was however constrained by several setbacks. These included: limited access to capital, leadership wrangles and lack of education, inadequate business and technical skills, and other organisational problems. With mutual support from other development partners women have potential that can be utilised in the fight against poverty in the district. In community projects women provide manual labour, and also make monetary contributions. Also, through song

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[83] Stamp, 'Kikuyu Women's Self-Help Groups', pp.41, 42.

[84] Kinyanjui, 'Peasant Organisations', p.312.

[85] KNA/AMC/15/15: Thika Division Annual Reports 1981-82.

[86] Carolyn Moser, *Gender Planning and Development: Theory Practice and Training* (London: Routledge, 1993), p.197.

and dance women do entertain guests during fundraisers. There are no formal organisations run by men which can match women's groups.[87]

Men may not be involved in SHGs to the same extent as women for reasons already stated. However, they make a substantial contribution towards community projects or what is commonly referred to as *harambee.* It is assumed that men-only projects are characterised by adequate access to resources due to their connection with the ruling polity and their own economic standing. Their projects are heavily economic and investment-oriented. Their projects therefore do not arise out of deprivation, limiting the energy and time devoted thereto.[88] As has been demonstrated in this study men's position in the society allows them to access resources more readily than women.

At independence, President Kenyatta implored Kenyans to engage in *harambee* which means 'pull together', to compliment efforts made by government in development projects. *Harambee* denotes collective effort, community self-reliance, cooperative enterprise and all forms of self-reliance. The *harambee* concept was founded on the principles of very structurally specific associations, which were voluntary, specific in functions, membership and maintained a high degree of solidarity.[89] Following this call many communities took the cue from Kenyatta and mobilised their resources in the building of educational institutions, water projects, churches, health centres, cattle dips, social halls and farming groups.[90]

The projects relied on donations from the community although they received a boost from foreign donors and the government as well (see chapters one and seven). The Gachororo, Mang'u, and Ngoliba are some of the water projects that were

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[87] See Gordon, *Transforming Capitalism and Patriarchy*.

[88] Janet Kilavuka, *A Comparative Study of the Socio-Economic Implications of Rural Women, Men, and Mixed Self-Help Groups: A Case of Kakamega District* (Addis Ababa: Organization for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa - OSSREA, 2003).

[89] Mbithi, *Self Reliance in Kenya*, p.13.

[90] KNA/MA/12/12: Kiambu District Annual Report 1971.

implemented through the community initiative in the 1970s.[91] Following the coffee boom in Kakuzi division four teacher's houses, four nursery centres, two cattle dips, twelve primary school classes, seven secondary classes, and four churches were built.[92] Kiambu High School and Kiambu Institute of Science and Technology, (KIST) and the Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT) were built through self-help programmes. During the late 1970s coffee boom many farmers invested in development projects especially in the construction of *harambee* schools.[93] Further, the development agents in the district played an equally significant role in funding and organising rural development projects to supplement the community initiatives.

In recent years micro-finance has gained currency as a means of escaping poverty in Third World economies. Since the 1990s, microfinance or small saving associations have been operating in the district. NNGOs have been fundamental in organising micro-finance for the local groups. Some of the groups are based on shares built of members contributions. The money that is raised through the sale of shares is lent to members in what is locally referred to as *gitati* (Kikuyu for rotational funding which are made on a regular basis around the members). Also, there are groups which are reliant on donor funding for their initial capital. The common thread in many of the groups is the education of the members as to the importance of accumulating savings for betterment of their own lives and that of their households. A few of the micro-credit groups are examined.

The Partnership for Productivity (PfP) was a local NGO that was started in 1968 in the Western Province of Kenya. The PfP provided a range of donor-funded developmental interventions with women's groups, including lending to individuals and groups in various parts of Thika. In 1997 the PfP operated in Gatundu and

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[91] KNA/AMC/15/5: Thika Division Annual Report 1977.

[92] KNA/XA:Murang'a District Annual Report 1977.

[93] Michael Lofchie, 'Politics of Agricultural Policy' in Joel Barkan (ed.) *Beyond Capitalism vs. Socialism in Kenya and Tanzania* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1994), p.141.

Kamwangi divisions where it supported 46 women's groups and one men's group.[94] The PfP provided credit to such groups and equipped members with skills in order to manage revolving funds and related income generating projects. The Kenya Entrepreneurship Promotion Programme (KEPP), born of a split in the PfP, continued with the same principles.

The KEPP operates like a rural bank. A group made of between fifteen and thirty members form a unit through which all operations are based. During the first meeting group members make a commitment to a minimum monthly share contribution of Sh.100. The contribution of the first meeting is immediately converted into small loans advanced to members of the group, payable at an interest rate of 10 percent per month. Members may save as much as they can before they apply for a loan from the collective kitty. Both short-and long-term advances are available to members. The former is also commonly referred to as *ngumbato.* It is usually advanced for a period of one month and is very popular among members. *Ngumbato* may be renewed for up to three months if the interest is paid monthly. Members are entitled to advances of between two and three times their savings. The other credit product is a long-term loan in which members can get up to three times their shares and is repayable for a period of between ten and 24 months.[95]

Registered self-help groups with at least 30 members could qualify for a KEPP loan. The groups are autonomous and deliberate on the range of products, interest rates, types of loans and penalties to be imposed. The credit funds are generated from the clients' own savings, from the interest earned by the groups on loans made to their members, and on loans from a for-profit financial institution which some members accessed when their group's resources were insufficient for their needs. The KEPP charges groups a fee to meet its running costs. The funds support the *ngumbato* savings initiative which are currently viewed as a rural village bank where poor

[94] RoK, *Thika District Development Plan 1997-2001*(Nairobi: Government Printer), p.61.

[95] Personal Communication, Sophie Kariuki, Thika, 5 February 2002.

women save as little as US$1 per month and could borrow loans ranging from US$35 to 500 from their groups.[96]

Social pressure is used as collateral in group lending. It is expected that commitment to a group will instil fiscal discipline among its members. Members are trained to learn how to save and utilise credit facilities as they are allowed access to small amounts of money for entrepreneurial purposes such as selling fresh produce and running small shops and hair saloons. Women tend to express total commitment to the projects and they are known to be better in repaying loans than men.[97] This view corroborates previous studies which have shown that women are often better in terms of saving as they are more responsible borrowers than men.[98] This may be traced to women's propensity to work harder and being less inclined to spend money on frivolous items. Past research in Kenya shows that increases in female earnings have a larger impact in improving family welfare than similar increases in male earnings.[99] When women's incomes improve they are more likely to spend it on their children's health, nutrition and educational needs. With money from the SHGs there has been increased purchasing power and an improved standard of living among the participants. Some of the members involved in the KEPP have managed to finance their children's secondary school education as they proudly reviewed their individual progress since they joined the KEPP.[100] The savings made from *ngumbato* were used to buy extra food and medicine or to pay school fees while the balance was reinvested in ones' enterprise.

The KEPP was involved with communities in Ruiru and Thika divisions. The organisation mainly worked with youths and women. It provided loans through the

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[96] *Ibid*.

[97] Kinyanjui, 'Peasant Organisations', p.307.

[98] Jane Guyer, 'Women's Role in Development', in R.J. Berg and S. Whitetaker (eds.) *Strategies for African Development* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), p.401.

[99] Manda Kulundu, Germano Mwabu and Mwangi Kimenyi, *Human Capital Externalities and Returns to Education in Kenya* (Nairobi: KIPPRA, 2002).

[100] Personal Communication, Margaret Karuu, Kamwangi, 14 April 2002.

Jua Kali Integrated Loan Scheme and the Women Support Programme. The KEPP also provided training in managerial skills to its beneficiaries. Since most members belonged to several groups, the benefits that were acquired by one group were easily extended to members of other groups. The more groups one belonged to the higher were the chances of assuming a leadership position in the groups. This synergetic effect of multiple membership was shared by others and this helped the groups to grow. NGOs are particularly lauded for their involvement of grassroots communities in their projects. These ideals have been achieved in some circumstances, but this generalisation cannot be applied to all NGOs.

However, NGOs and women's groups have not received positive appraisal from all sectors. Critics of NGOs that are dealing with poverty alleviation programmes argue that they do not tackle women's subordination, nor do they transform' the systems and structures which determine the distribution of power and resources within and between societies.[101] In the same vein, critics of NGOs view them as a conduit of neo-colonialism and discredit them for a lack of 'increased political efficacy'.[102] Mismanagement has sometimes marred the realisation of the set goals. Kabira and Nzioki have argued that women's groups are a weak channel for empowerment because their project or initiatives 'only modestly address the issues relating to structures that perpetuate inequality and subordination of women…are the lowest form of empowerment'.[103] In spite of the criticisms levelled against these associations, the positives outweigh the negatives.

My contention is that too few resources reach the poor owing to institutional failure. The poor bear the brunt of such inefficiency and the appropriate initiatives by NGOs in regard to sustainable agriculture, service to PLWAs and the destitute, is remarkable. The income generated by women' groups, however minimal, has contributed to the survival and at times vertical mobility of the households that are involved. The women who are committed to self-help groups admit that their status in

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[101] David Hulme and Michael Edwards (eds.) *NGOs, States and Donors: Too Close for Comfort?* (London: Macmillan, 1997), p.280.

[102] Dicklitch, *The Elusive Promise of NGOs in Africa*, p.3.

[103] Kabira, *Celebrating Women's Resistance*, pp.77, 78.

the families and in the community has been elevated, and this gives them a sense of pride and power. The power of the women's groups has been reinforced by the injection of external aid by formal NGOs which have greatly increased the local capacity building amongst the beneficiaries of their projects. Indigenous knowledge and structures of the *gitati* and *ngwatio* have been used by NGOs to ensure an effective delivery of service to the local communities. People's own participation can be enhanced by drawing on local knowledge and local resources and integrating their innovativeness into broader interventionist measures which breed collective empowerment.[104]

Poverty Coping Strategies at the Household Level

A household is defined as a basic social unit. It is in the household that the effects of poverty are most glaring. In circumstances where income is falling, government subsidies are withdrawn and consumer prices are no longer controlled, households have had to cut down on their daily consumption. Households have devised specific measures by which they cope with poverty. Intra-household differences were evident given that women and men experience and respond to poverty differently, not least because of gender relations. As we have already stated, women by virtue of their role as home-makers, are directly affected by poverty. They have therefore developed specific ways within and without households to cope with poverty.

Food poverty becomes the most immediate problem that confounds poor women. As households adjust their budgets, expensive food items are deleted from the family diets and nutritional intake is compromised in many ways. Also, women spend much time in the market in pursuit of cheap food stuffs paying little or no attention to the nutritional value of the items (see chapter three). Pulses replace other sources of protein such as meat and fish which are more expensive to them. Consumer clubs, which were evident in the 1970s, have been reincarnated by way of informal shopping clubs. Women, who are mainly in the informal sector, join consumer clubs whose members pool their money and purchase food items in bulk, in order to obtain a discount. [105] The items are equitably shared amongst the members of a group. Indeed

[104] Tendon, 'Riding High or Nosediving', p.46.

[105] Personal Communication, Doris Ngugi, Thika, 5 March 2002.

the resurfacing of consumer clubs in the late 1990s was a reflection of the extent to which the household economy had been undermined by what was happening at the macro-level. In the 1970s and early 1980s there was little mention of these clubs which had disappeared soon after independence.

In cases of dire financial stress, households are forced to make do with less than three meals a day. Indeed a midday meal is a luxury that most households can ill afford. The supper comprises *ugali na sukumawiki* (Kiswahili for pap and kales). This is the most common meal because it is cheap and could even be cheaper if a family collects vegetables from the fields. According to a businesswoman who herself could not have been considered poor by any measure, the poor were identified as those who could not afford obtain three meals a day or those whose children *kurarira* (Kikuyu go to bed without food).[106]

To overcome food insecurity, smallholders lease land to expand their farming. The land that is selected for lease is located in a different ecological region in order to spread the risk of crop failure. For instance, households in Gatundu lease land in Ruiru divisions and vice versa. Households could also lease land along the river banks where they grow vegetables, sugarcane and arrowroots for their own subsistence and surplus.[107] In Karatu Location in Gatundu division tea farmers sublet portions of their land and shared the profits with the leasee.[108]

For the landless and those on the coffee estates food shortages are frequent and it is not uncommon to find women foraging for vegetables from the coffee fields. Some of the wild vegetables they pick include *terere* (amaranthus) leaves, *managu, murenda and marenge* (African pumpkin). The workers undertake the risk of collecting

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[106] Personal Communication, Wanjiku wa Soja, Ruiru, 23 April 2002.

[107] Personal Communication, Mary Njonjo, Kamwangi, 24 April 2002.

[108] RoK, *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper Thika District* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 2001), p.10.

vegetables from recently sprayed coffee fields or collecting dangerous wild herbs.[109] In some cases, workers have been accused of stealing food from neighbouring farms.

Another strategy among the workers in commercial agriculture is the diversification of their sources of income. For example, they engage in petty trading, cultivation in neighbouring coffee estates and keeping of livestock. Workers construct small sheds in their compounds where they keep poultry and goats. The keeping of livestock is in contravention of labour line rules and regulations and cost the workers a heavy penalty, including possible terminal dismissal of offenders. Seemingly, the reality has rendered some of the rules obsolete. Both the management and workers acknowledge the grinding poverty that afflicts the workers who have to evolve survival strategies sometimes in total disregard of the regulations that could not be bent two decades ago.

The linkage between urban area and countryside generated some income for those living in the rural areas. For parents whose children are working, remittances form the bulk of their source of livelihood. Such households can sometimes afford to spread risks by establishing a grocery shop on their own farms or increasing their agricultural surplus by hiring extra labour. For the very poor households who do not have working children or whose children are still not working, their coping strategies are inward looking and therefore very limited. They depend on an already impoverished local economy. For instance, they dispose of their maize when it is still wet only to buy it at high prices when supply is low.

Better-off families purchase dry cereals during the harvest season, stock them and sell them at the times of short supply thus making hefty profits. This kind of trading is for not the very poor since the initial capital outlay is hard to raise. In some instances, women who have surplus capital travel to distant places, for example Murang'a and Maragwa districts, where they buy baskets and pots. With these items they travel through the rich agricultural divisions of Thika, especially during harvest time and exchange the items for cereals at competitive prices. They later sell the cereals during periods of short supply at a profit. This form of barter trade is a strategy that women have devised to enhance their own survival and that of their families. In Eastern parts

[109] Personal Communication, Margaret Ngendo, Ruiru, 20 April 2002.

of the district, which are generally dry, handicrafts such as *kiondo* had been modified to meet both utilitarian as well as aesthetic value and this forms a major source of income.[110]

Illegal brewing and selling of liquor is another strategy for coping with poverty adopted by the residents of Thika. While women are mainly responsible for selling illicit brews, men are associated with the escalating levels of murder, carjackings and burglary which are widespread in the district.[111] Although there is a link between violent crime and poverty, this in no way does not suggest that all criminal activity is the result of poverty.

In the service sector the bicycle taxi or *boda boda* (slang for border to border) transport business was the most recent of innovations in the search of livelihood. Since the mid-1990s bicycle owners have been ferrying people in the district. The business started in areas that have a poor road network but over the years the *boda boda* business has spread to most parts of the district. Cyclists charge a fee to transport people to various points thus saving them time while earning a source of livelihood. The business is a male domain.

Poverty has forced people to revert to traditional institutions that offered support in times of need. Since the mid-1990s men have reverted to the *mariika* or age set system whereby they hold monthly, quarterly and annual meetings.[112] The age set system has been 'reinvented' to deal with cases of deprivation and want. In pre-colonial Kikuyu communities the age sets were fundamental social units that provided security, support and help for those in a specific age set. For instance, men of a given age set make contributions to a kitty that is used to finance funerals and weddings for other members of the group. In case members make substantial savings they move away from being basically welfare-oriented projects to tackling more demanding

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[110] Felistus Kinyanjui, 'Aspects of Traditional Industries in Kenya, 1880-1990: A Case Study of Kiambu District' (M.Phil. Thesis, Moi University, 1997), p.56.

[111] RoK, *Thika District Development Plan 2002-2008* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 2002), p.47.

[112] Kinyanjui, 'Peasant Organisations', p. 310.

enterprises such as purchase of land or building of residential plots in both rural and urban areas. On the other hand, women have gone back to 'clanism' where the daughters of a particular lineage come together in kinship networks which closely resemble the self-help groups in terms of principles and functions.

In this chapter we have traced the diverse strategies adopted by the government, NGOs and communities to improve rural livelihoods in Thika. Unemployment and inequality have been targets that the post-colonial state has grappled with although solutions remain elusive. The efforts have been largely unsuccessful owing to domestic and external forces. Although the government was committed to poverty alleviation at independence and during the decades that followed, the demands of changing circumstances revealed shifting development planning and the inconsistent pursuit of sectoral objectives in National Development Plans and Sessional Papers. Notwithstanding occasional Plans that were devoted to poverty alleviation the government departments were constantly confronted with insufficient budgets. Through Moi's capture of *harambee* as a local initiative, it was speedily brought under presidential control in the name of assisting the *mwananchi* and distributing resources more equitably across ethno-regional interests. Apathy towards *harambees* developed mainly because of perpetual rejection of proposals channelled by the grassroot communities. Accordingly, in the 1990s *harambee* activities were on a relative decline in spite of the district's renowned voluntary ethos. Small enterprises and micro-finance proliferated and thrived in the district as alternative sources of development. Supplements from local and foreign NGOs and CBOs have proved invaluable in assisting communities to cope with grinding poverty. Drawing on local knowledge and local resources, NGOs facilitated the implementation of measures that led to collective empowerment.[113] NGOs were significant in the establishment of HIV/AIDS support programmes and micro-credit institutions.

The burden of poverty has been borne by women who, as care givers and child rearers, have had to devise coping mechanism at the household level and beyond. To break the yoke of patriarchy women transformed the traditional collective cultivation groups' *ngwatio* to *mabati* and later to *gitati.* The principles of reciprocity govern the various institutions. These groups, be they women's groups or CBOs, were a product

[113] Tendon, 'Riding High or Nosediving', p.46.

of social innovation necessitated by collective demand for modernisation and the alleviation of poverty.

In the rural set-up women are disadvantaged in many ways and yet they are discriminated against in regard to formal employment and ownership of land. Women do not have much decision-making power over major production issues. Paradoxically they have to shoulder the burden of household reproduction despite their marginal control over resources. They are responsible for fending, nurturing and even caring for the sick members of their households and neighbours. Men who have control over resources, do not always give resources at their disposal to their families. Instead, they are involved in alcohol consumption and neglect familial obligations. To survive, households and communities make strategic choices that are evident in the people's ingenious and innovative solutions.

CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUSION

The slogan 'Making Poverty History', used by among others, OXFAM has gained currency in 2005 as a culmination of past interventions to tackle global poverty. In order to combat poverty there is a need to have empirical data that grounds our understanding of the causes of poverty. This study set out to analyse the causes of persistent and pervasive poverty in Thika district of Kenya between c.1953 and 2000. This is the first systematic study to engage with poverty in Thika district. It explores the genesis of poverty, the role of both external and internal forces in the immiseration of the residents of Thika.

The study was predicated upon the notion that every situation of extreme poverty around the world contains some of its own unique causes, which need to be diagnosed just as a doctor would a patient.[1] Poverty was defined as an inability to afford food and other basic needs despite prudent spending and devotion of resources to meet this objective.

The study adopted a political economy approach and demonstrated the inter play between geography, history and politics in the transformation of livelihoods in Thika. Thika district formed part of the Eastern White Highlands. The colonial state established a settler economy that supplanted the pre-colonial modes of production. Land alienation, institutionalisation of forced labour, imposition of poll and hut taxes, and restrictions on African production of profitable crops, including coffee, were the main mechanisms employed to subjugate the people of Thika. Peasant commodity production was kept under check and any African initiative suppressed at the earliest opportunity to counter any competition to the favoured settler agriculture sector.

The Africans were confined to congested reserves where continued years of cultivation caused soil depletion leading to frequent food shortages. Moreover, accumulation of land by a few Kikuyu caused land litigation which the colonial authority blamed on continuous fragmentation, characteristic of customary land tenure. The expulsion of the Kikuyu from the Rift Valley to the Kikuyu reserves

[1] Jeffrey Sachs, 'The End of Poverty', *Time Magazine*, March 14, 2005, p.35.

compounded the crisis causes by ravages of poverty and sparked conflicts which culminated in the Mau Mau war of the 1950s. Subsequently, the colonial government bore to the pressure and introduced land reform through the Swynnerton Plan of 1954. The Plan introduced capitalist forms of property ownership which are still in use to date. This enhanced the on going process of differentiation among the Kikuyu a process which has intensified inequality over the years.

The grim picture of Thika might come as a surprise to policymakers and others because the extant literature depicts Thika favourably. The literature focuses on the 'glory days' of Thika which was then referred to as the as the 'Birmingham of East Africa'. During the First Republic state resources were channelled to development projects in Central Province, in general, and Kiambu, in particular. However, this should not prevent us from taking cognisance of the fact that the Kikuyu community is dynamic and heterogeneous. Indeed, the Kikuyu are individualistic, parochial and identify with kin from their 'home' district on the basis of class rather than 'tribe'.[2] Mistrust and suspicion characterize relations between the various Kikuyu sub-groups and in certain circumstances class interests surpass those of ethnicity. In no way does this suggest that a clique did not use its political proximity to the centre of power to amass wealth but this did not necessarily trickle down to the majority of the peasantry.

The study shows how the Kenyatta clique, which comprised mainly sons of colonial chiefs and Home Guards, engaged in a breakneck accumulation of individual wealth guided by narrow ethnic and class interests. The new aristocrats, variously referred to as the 'Court or Family', own close to a third of the land in Thika today. Most of this land has been lying idle for close to forty years, while the landed poor and squatters who form a substantial proportion of Thika's population are squeezed into plots. Without land, the main source of livelihood and individual advancement most people in Thika, were pushed to the margins of the economy. It is contended that the inequitable distribution of land evident in Thika depicts a classic case of the paradox of poverty in the midst of plenty. Cases of malnutrition and food insecurity abound.

[2] Jean-Francois Bayart, *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly* (London: Longman, 1993), p.51.

Shrinkage in acreage, use of inappropriate technology and erratic rainfall, particularly, in the eastern parts of the district pose serious challenges to the livelihoods of the inhabitants.

Food poverty in Thika was traced to both monocropping, and the continuing human-wild life conflict, especially in the eastern parts of the district. Sustainable agricultural development should attempt to harness the partially unexploited niche in the horticultural sector currently being undertaken by individuals and self-help groups on a small scale. A ready market for horticultural produce does exist in the urban centres in Thika but, as recently as in 2003, the Kenya Fruit Processors, a leading processing plant, closed up following a lack of consistent supply of vegetables and lack of proper marketing of their produce. With prudent planning the many rivers in the district can be used for irrigation thus turning around the economy of Thika.

For the poor *mwananchi*, Thika was therefore neither the land of plenty during Kenyatta's time nor thereafter. Although there was paucity of evidence that poverty was persistent in Thika, extant literature propagated the erroneous though widely upheld perspective that during the Kenyatta regime resources were directed to the development of Central Province. This shrouded the reality of the abject poverty that lay beyond the façade of plenty and it bred contempt for the Kikuyu community. This was mirrored in anti-Kikuyu ideology projected to all Kikuyu who presumably had monopolised *matunda ya uhuru* (Kiswahili for the fruits of independence). Among the key proponents of this notion are Leonard, [3] Haugerud,[4] Oyugi[5], Atieno-Odhiambo,[6] Oucho[7] and Kanyinga.[8] The obvious funnelling of state resources to

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[3] David Leonard, 'Class Formation and Agricultural Development' in Joel Barkan, (ed.) *Politics and Public Policy in Kenya and Tanzania* (New York: Praeger, 1984), p.150.

[4] Angelique Haugerud, *The Culture of Politics in Modern Kenya* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p.101.

[5] E. Oyugi, *The Legacy of Colonialism* (Nairobi: Coalition for Social Watch, 2000).

[6] Elisha Atieno-Odhiambo, 'Hegemonic Enterprises and Instrumentalists of Survival: Ethnicity and Democracy in Kenya', *African Studies*, 61, 2 (2002), p.240.

[7] J. Oucho, *Undercurrents of Ethnic Conflict in Kenya* (The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill, 2002).

some Kikuyu is not without substance but it is an exaggeration to assume that all in Thika/Kiambu enjoyed state patronage.

During the Moi era deliberate measures were undertaken to demobilise the Kikuyu. To start with, the Moi administration introduced radical shift in the agricultural policy from one of export to one of self-sufficiency in food production. This was followed by diversion of resources from coffee farming to wheat farming in a political move to appease the Kalenjin, who were largely cereal farmers. Since the 1980s political appointees were given top management positions in the Coffee Board of Kenya (CBK), which subsequently lost clout as a representative of coffee farmers' interests. Similarly, other coffee institutions were ruined by political meddling. Delayed and rigged elections, embezzlement and siphoning of farmer's money, which informants alleged 'was eaten at the top' is reflective of the Kenya situation more broadly. The study shows how political meddling in coffee institutions ruined the industry which has been not only Thika's but Kenya's 'lifeline' since the colonial period. The enthusiasm that characterised the 'coffee rush' of the 1950s contrasts sharply with the despair and delusion that has become coffee farming since the mid-1980s. It is argued that the troubled coffee sector is a microcosm of Kenya's political economy.

The liberalisation of the coffee sub-sector through the Coffee Act of 2001 whittled away the powers of the CBK and introduced token liberalisation in the sector, but the dividends are yet to trickle down to farmers. It is proposed that to revamp the sector there is an urgent need to further liberalise it at the level of production and allow co-operative societies to run it without state interference. The continuing scramble for milling and marketing control of coffee suggest that coffee is still brisk business. Given that Kenya's quality arabica coffee still enjoys a premium price in the world market, there is room to turn around the fortunes of the coffee industry.

The deterioration in the working conditions of the workers in the commercial agricultural sector in the district further depicts the tensions between the state, capital

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[8] Karuti Kanyinga, 'Concentrated Multipolarity: Ghana, Kenya and India' in Yusuf Bangura (ed.) *Ethnic Inequality and the Public Sector: A Comparative Study* (Geneva: UNRISD, 2004), p.40.

and labour. The study showed that since the colonial period, little has been done to improve the working and living conditions of workers on the coffee plantations. Wages paid to workers were not reflective of economic realities as most planters argued that coffee prices were on a downward trend. Plantation life was a last resort for an already disinherited majority who did not have land in their rural homes where they could retire. Another dynamic of plantation poverty was how the cycle of poverty continued as many of the workers who had little value for education denied their own children an opportunity to acquire an education. It therefore presented an example of transgenerational poverty as children were viewed as assets who had to quit school to augment familial income. Whilst poverty and child labour are entwined it is not only after poverty is overcome that the use of child labour can be halted. For it is only when the wages of paid to plantation workers are increased that there is any likelihood that children, who previously were forced to work to supplement household income, would be freed to attend school. Past experience shows that legislation on child labour on its own cannot combat child labour. Therefore, it is recommended that intervention measures to end child labour should go hand in hand with a campaign to create economically empowered family units.

Poverty is closely tied to the incidence of ill health in Thika. A myriad of preventable diseases are endemic to Thika making it an epidemiological zone. Owing to lack of proper sanitation and drinking water the residents of Thika are perennially exposed to waterborne diseases today as they were early in the 20^{th} century. The heavy presence of coffee pulperies and industrial plants were a major source of pollution of water sources. Complaints from the Department of Public Health and those of residents abound. The current penalty imposed on pollution offenders is too low to act as a deterrent. Yet, little has been done in regard to review legislation on pollution. In circumstances in which the demand for health care services has always outstripped the supply, the residents of Thika were besieged by the HIV/AIDS pandemic. For the patients affected by the disease it was double misery as the onset of the disease coincided with the withdrawal of the state from providing health care services. The continuous inadequacy of supplies at the hospitals in Thika has also been contextualised within the politics of decentralisation which was a ruse employed by the Moi administration to marginalise the Kikuyu while privileging the purportedly ‘neglected’ areas. The Moi regime strongly articulated the ideology that only areas loyal to the regime and ruling party could expect to benefit from state resources. The allocation of state resources was based on political patronage. Ethnic politics undermined the principles of empowerment and participation. Years of neglect and disrepair were manifested in a dilapidated road network and lack of essential services in Thika. It is therefore argued that an escalation of poverty in Thika, athough anchored in the economic reforms of the time, can be best understood in the ethnic politics of the Kenyan landscape.

The district experiences heavy rates of migration which increases the supply and demand sides of the commercial sex industry, a prerequisite for the spread of STIs and HIV/AIDS. As early as the late 1970s, Thika was already recording escalating levels of sexually transmitted diseases which probably was a precursor to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the greatest health challenge at the moment. The industries in Gatundu, Githurai, Juja, Ruiru and Thika and the coffee plantations remain major sources of migrant labour, particularly for single spouses. With the closure of most of the local textile industries, women, who were mainly employed in the factories were retrenched in the 'right-sizing' exercise. Most of them did not return to their rural homes but instead turned to the petty commodity and sex trades. Many women in the district were economically marginalised and this increased their dependence on earnings from sex to maintain household income. When faced with instant starvation and dire financial needs, they chose to die sooner rather than later. Therefore, they were less likely to decline unprotected sex from clients who were unwilling to use condoms. This increased their chances of contracting STIs and/or the HIV/AIDS virus. The higher incidence of HIV/AIDS amongst women rather than men shows exactly how vulnerable females are. The study identified housemaids as 'vectors of transmission of HIV/AIDS', a factor that has previously received inadequate attention.

Further, the pervasive production and consumption of illicit liquor increased the likelihood of indiscriminate sex among those who patronised the dens where these brews are sold. It was observed that the illicit beer brewing was part a product and a cause of poverty. This suggests that combating HIV/AIDS should move beyond a strategy of focusing on the risky behaviour that influences the fast spread of the disease to one geared towards correcting the economic realities that motivate and reward such behaviour. In other words, the alleviations of poverty can help combat HIV/AIDS.

In many instances, women were denied the right to own property, access to education and subsequently access to formal employment. A rise in the number of female-headed households in the last few years points towards a disproportionate share of the burden of poverty being borne by women in the district. It is contended that men and women experience poverty differently on account of the existing power relations.

The study found that the poor are proactive and are aware that context-specific coping mechanisms can improve their social conditions. Drawing on the Kikuyu customary practice of *ngwatio, matega* and *gitati,* types of self-help groups, residents of Thika have transformed their livelihoods, albeit in a small way. With the earnings accrued by self-help groups, women bought basic households goods such as utensils, furniture, grade cows, water tanks, farm inputs and with time they replaced the grass-thatch with corrugated iron sheets. Through the self-help groups, women were able to meet households' needs and the larger community projects such as construction of nurseries to universities, cattle dips to coffee and tea factories, and farm and bus purchases. The growth of these self-help groups was given a boost by formal NGOs. The synergy between formal and informal grassroots organisations played an invaluable role in both horizontal and vertical empowerment of individual members of such groups. In time, it was no longer a struggle to survive but the groups moved towards sustainable development. After meeting the basic needs they could afford to dispose of some of the agricultural produce following adoption of modern methods of farming. By the end of the 1980s, women's groups were already involved in other activities, including micro-finance. It is recommended that the invaluable experience that the poor gained from such project initiatives can be integrated in anti-poverty programmes through the replication of such activities elsewhere.

My extensive use of participant's real voices and transcriptions of interviews helps capture the experiences, nuances and perspectives of the informants. The study was context specific and it highlighted the unique conditions, which increased the vulnerability of the residents of Thika. This study can be useful to policy makers, researchers and other persons interested in development studies.

In this study of subaltern groups the untold narratives of the landless and the land poor, the disillusioned coffee farmers, the squalid lifestyle of workers in commercial agriculture and voiceless victims of the HIV/AIDS and their agency in the daily struggles against poverty are represented. The unique conditions found in Thika make it not exactly a microcosm of poverty in Kenya, but neither is Thika that exceptional, that similar insights cannot be applied elsewhere in Kenya. This study has attempted to correct the misconception that all Kikuyu of Kiambu were beneficiaries of politics of patrimonialism by presenting a detailed study of an impoverished population in Thika. The study makes a modest contribution towards the historiography of Thika and poverty-related studies.

In conclusion, poverty is a process and a consequence of the inter play of a multiplicity of factors. It was demonstrated that poverty was attributable to Thika’s unique history, geography and politics that have informed the discourses and social activities of the people. The institutional arrangements that created barriers and restrictions on the poor prevented an increase in earnings and therefore their abilities to earn a livelihood were undermined. The disempowerment of the subaltern groups by both the political and economic elites was apparent. In some instances the poor, too, were complacent to their own misery. Multiple intervention measures are a prerequisite in the fight against poverty. Unequal power relations that perpetuate poverty must be overhauled. Equity, access and ownership issues should be addressed in land distribution in Kenya, which is long overdue. Also, international support is of necessity if the global war against poverty is to be won.

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11.	Doris Ngugi	Thika	5 March 2002.
12.	Elizabeth Njoki	Kamwangi	23 April 2002.
13.	Esther Nyabari	Kamwangi	24 April 2002.
14.	Esther Mumbi	Ruiru	29 March 2002.
15.	Felister Njeri	Gatundu	2 April 2002.
16.	Felister Wanjiru	Ruiru	15 March 2002.
17.	Francis Munyua	Ruiru	25 April 2002.
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21.	Gabriel Waweru	Kamwangi	23 May 2002.
22.	Gathoni Ndiiro	Kakuzi	20 January 2002.
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