



National Library  
of Canada

Bibliothèque nationale  
du Canada

Canadian Theses Service    Service des thèses canadiennes

Ottawa, Canada  
K1A 0N4

## NOTICE

The quality of this microform is heavily dependent upon the quality of the original thesis submitted for microfilming. Every effort has been made to ensure the highest quality of reproduction possible.

If pages are missing, contact the university which granted the degree.

Some pages may have indistinct print especially if the original pages were typed with a poor typewriter ribbon or if the university sent us an inferior photocopy.

Reproduction in full or in part of this microform is governed by the Canadian Copyright Act, R.S.C. 1970, c. C-30, and subsequent amendments.

## AVIS

La qualité de cette microforme dépend grandement de la qualité de la thèse soumise au microfilmage. Nous avons tout fait pour assurer une qualité supérieure de reproduction.

S'il manque des pages, veuillez communiquer avec l'université qui a conféré le grade.

La qualité d'impression de certaines pages peut laisser à désirer, surtout si les pages originales ont été dactylographiées à l'aide d'un ruban usé ou si l'université nous a fait parvenir une photocopie de qualité inférieure.

La reproduction, même partielle, de cette microforme est soumise à la Loi canadienne sur le droit d'auteur, SRC 1970, c. C-30, et ses amendements subséquents.

**WOMEN AND CHILDREN'S LABOUR IN RURAL ECONOMY: A CASE  
STUDY OF WESTERN PROVINCE KENYA, 1902-1985.**

by

**RUTH NASIMIYU**

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
at Dalhousie University.

© Copyright by Ruth Nasimiyu, 1991



National Library  
of Canada

Bibliothèque nationale  
du Canada

Canadian Theses Service

Service des thèses canadiennes

Ottawa, Canada  
K1A 0N4

The author has granted an irrevocable non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of his/her thesis by any means and in any form or format, making this thesis available to interested persons.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in his/her thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without his/her permission.

L'auteur a accordé une licence irrévocable et non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de sa thèse de quelque manière et sous quelque forme que ce soit pour mettre des exemplaires de cette thèse à la disposition des personnes intéressées.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège sa thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

ISBN 0-315-64526-1

Canada

DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

The undersigned hereby certify that they have read and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance a thesis entitled "Women and Children's Labour in Rural Economy: A Case Study of Western Province, Kenya, 1902-1985"

---

---

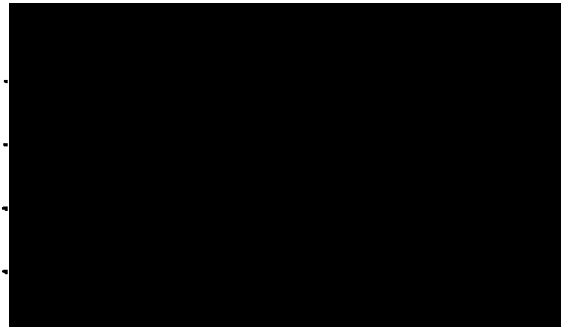
by Ruth Nasimiyu

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Ⓒ

Dated April 18, 1991

External Examiner  
Research Supervisor  
Examining Committee



---

---

---

DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY

Date April 18, 1991

Author Ruth Nasimiyu

Title Women and Children's Labour in Rural Economy: A Case  
Study of Western Province Kenya, 1902-1985

Department or School History

Degree: Ph.D. Convocation May Year 1991

Permission is herewith granted to Dalhousie University to circulate and to have copied for non-commercial purposes, at its discretion, the above title upon the request of individuals or institutions.

  
Signature of Author

THE AUTHOR RESERVES OTHER PUBLICATION RIGHTS, AND NEITHER THE THESIS NOR EXTENSIVE EXTRACTS FROM IT MAY BE PRINTED OR OTHERWISE REPRODUCED WITHOUT THE AUTHOR'S WRITTEN PERMISSION.

THE AUTHOR ATTESTS THAT PERMISSION HAS BEEN OBTAINED FOR THE USE OF ANY COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL APPEARING IN THIS THESIS (OTHER THAN BRIEF EXCERPTS REQUIRING ONLY PROPER ACKNOWLEDGMENT IN SCHOLARLY WRITING) AND THAT ALL SUCH USE IS CLEARLY ACKNOWLEDGED.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
ABSTRACT .....	vi
ABBREVIATIONS .....	vii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	viii-ix
 <u>CHAPTER I</u>	
INTRODUCTION .....	1-21
 <u>CHAPTER II</u>	
MODES OF APPROPRIATION AND WOMEN'S PROPERTY RIGHTS IN WESTERN PROVINCE, 1902-1985 .....	22-72
 <u>CHAPTER III</u>	
WOMEN AND CHILDREN'S LABOUR IN RURAL SUBSISTENCE ECONOMY: WESTERN PROVINCE IN THE 20TH CENTURY .....	73-119
 <u>CHAPTER IV</u>	
FEMALE AND CHILD LABOUR IN THE RURAL CASH CROP PRODUCTION: WESTERN PROVINCE IN THE 20TH CENTURY ...	120-182
 <u>CHAPTER V</u>	
COLONIAL LABOUR POLICY AND LEGISLATION IN KENYA: ITS IMPACT ON WOMEN AND CHILDREN'S LABOUR, 1902-1963 ..	183-251
 <u>CHAPTER VI</u>	
WOMEN'S INITIATIVES AND WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS IN RURAL NON-FARM ENTERPRISES IN WESTERN PROVINCE IN THE 20TH CENTURY .....	252-317
 <u>CHAPTER VII</u>	
SELF-RELIANT DEVELOPMENT IN KENYA: WOMEN'S SURVIVAL STRATEGIES IN RURAL ECONOMY,	

WESTERN PROVINCE, 1945-1985 .....	318-406
<u>CONCLUSION</u> .....	407-415
<u>BIBLIOGRAPHY</u> .....	416-436

## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines women's and children's labour in Kenya's Western Province, a rural economy, in the colonial and post-colonial periods. It begins with an examination of African patriarchal forms of the division of labour between the sexes in the pre-colonial period. The thesis analyses the impact of colonial rule and the introduction of white settler farming and the effects of this on the use of technology in the production of subsistence and cash crops in Western Province, not itself an area of white settlement, but one profoundly influenced by migrant labour outflows to settler areas. A discussion of colonial policy reveals that policies which ostensibly should have controlled this process and protected both women and children were in effect never applied seriously, given a tacit alliance between European and African patriarchs who were in control of policy implementation and who stressed its impracticality. Finally, the thesis analyses women's responses to their own marginalisation and the forms of their strategies for survival. At the individual level women were able to use markets and the cash economy to carve out niches for themselves as traders and a few of them achieved outstanding success. At a collective level, the emergence of organised and ably led women's groups developed from pre-colonial traditions of women's cooperative labour gangs. These new groups have become one of the most important forces for self-reliant development in Kenya.



## ABBREVIATIONS

A.D.C	....	African Development Council
AFC	....	Agricultural Finance Co-operation
CBS	....	Central Bureau of Statistics (Kenya)
CO	....	Colonial Office
CMS	....	Church Missionary Society
DDC	....	District Development Committee
EAS	....	East African Standard
EAPH	....	East African Publishing House
EAWL	....	East African Women's League
ILO	....	International Labour Organisation
IMC	....	International Missionary Council
IRS	....	Integrated Rural Survey
KANU	....	Kenya African National Union
KNFU	....	Kenya National Farmers Union
KNA	....	Kenya National Archives
MYW	....	Maendeleo Ya Wanawake (Progress of Women)
MWAC	....	Malakisi Women Advancing Council
NAD	....	Native Affairs Department
OUP	....	Oxford University Press
PWD	....	Public Works Department
Rok	....	Republic of Kenya
SRDP	....	Special Rural Development Programme
TUC	....	Trade Union Congress (British).

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Financial support during this study was provided by Dalhousie University's general scholarship fund, which I gratefully acknowledge. Additional funds were also provided by the Directorate of Personnel Management, Office of the President, Kenya which I sincerely appreciate.

The preparation of this thesis was achieved with a lot of co-operation from many individuals and institutions: the Public Record Office in London, the Kenya National Archives, the University of Nairobi library, Institute of African Studies and Institute of Development Studies libraries at the University of Nairobi, the Ministry of Agriculture library, Central Bureau of Statistics in the Ministry of Finance and National Planning and the sub-department of Women's Bureau library in the Ministry of Culture and Social Services in Kenya are all owed a special thanks. Of course, the Killam Memorial library provided the base for writing the thesis. I am sincerely grateful to the library staff for the help I received.

In Halifax, I am sincerely grateful to Prof. J.L.Parpart my supervisor, who guided me in writing this thesis. I am also deeply indebted to Professors J.Flint and J.B.Webster who provided their valuable comments and guidance for the two most crucial months while Professor Parpart was away in Southern Africa. Their constructive comments and guidance helped to sharp this thesis up to its present state. I also thank my

fellow graduate students in the History Department who were invaluable in their support and thoughtful encouragement, especially when the going was rough.

Last but not least, I would like to record my sincere thanks to the University of Nairobi and particularly the Institute of African Studies for granting me study leave which has enabled me to concentrate on my studies. I am particularly grateful to Prof. G.S.Were, the Director, Institute of African Studies for his constant encouragement and keen interest in my work.

My deepest regard goes to my family, particularly Chris and my children Ndinyo and Natembeya for their understanding, patience and support. To all, I say thank you especially my parents, who had the foresight of taking me to school without due considerations for my gender.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

East African labour historiography has made major advances in the past two decades. While the focus has been diversified, ranging from resistance to colonial occupation, political struggle to independence, and the formation of the working class and trade union movement, little attention has been paid to the role of women and children in agricultural production. Women and children's labour contributions have remained largely invisible to social and economic historians in the region.

Women and children's labour has been basically a consideration of labour in the informal sector, particularly in agricultural and handicraft production, marketing, and domestic activities. In much of Africa, women are the farmers and their work was and still is fundamental to subsistence production. At the same time, they have been involved in producing cash crops and other marketable goods. However, they usually have little control over the sale and profits for these goods.

During the colonial period, Kenya became a settler-dominated, agriculturally based economy.<sup>1</sup> But the

---

<sup>1</sup> R.M.A. Van Zwanenberg, Colonial Capitalism and Labour in Kenya 1919-1939, (Kampala: East African Literature Bureau, 1975), see also Van Zwanenberg and Anne King, An Economic History of Kenya and Uganda, 1800-1970, (New Jersey, Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1975), E.A. Brett, Colonialism and

establishment and consolidation of settler production in Kenya did not lead to the destruction of peasant commodity production. On the contrary, many Kenyans responded favourably to the opportunities presented by the commodity market. Indeed, foreign agribusiness flourished as well as peasant production. Thus, the organisation of labour in Kenya needs to be situated within the context of the contradictions between settler production, peasant production and foreign firms all of which competed for African labour.<sup>2</sup> This competition, along with the increase in agricultural output, clearly led to the intensification of labour for African women, men and children.

Much has been written about formal wage labour in Kenya, but very little has been written about casual and non-wage labour whether in the rural or urban areas. The evolution of the colonial labour policies in Kenya was partially handled by A. Clayton and D. Savage.<sup>3</sup> The main focus of their study was on unionized labour and the activities of trade union movement in Kenya. As a result women and children's labour was only mentioned in passing. Similarly, Sharon Stichter examined

---

Underdevelopment in East Africa: the Politics of Economic Change, 1919-1939, (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1973), and M.P.K. Sorrenson, Origins of European Settlement in Kenya, (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1969).

<sup>2</sup> Alice Amsden, International Firms and Labour in Kenya, 1945-1970, (London: Frank Cass, 1971).

<sup>3</sup> A. Clayton and D.S. Savage, Government and Labour in Kenya, 1895-1963, (London: Frank Cass, 1974)

migrant labour in Kenya.<sup>4</sup> Like other studies on formal labour in Africa, she focussed on wage labour and trade union movements.

Up to 1945 women and children formed part of the plantation casual labour force especially on coffee, tea and sisal estates.<sup>5</sup> Female and child labour was not unionized because it was casual. As a result, it has not been adequately treated in Kenyan labour historiography. Women and children's labour contributions on plantation farms and estates and in rural areas has for the most part been invisible and therefore ignored despite acknowledgement that their work was casual and that it increased with the introduction of cash crops. Undoubtedly, there is an urgent need for case studies of women and children's labour to form a clear picture of the complex labour situation in Africa.

Some scholars who recognise the importance of female labour in African rural economies have correctly suggested

---

<sup>4</sup> Sharon Stichter, Migrant Labour in Kenya: Capitalism and African Response 1875-1975, (London: Longmann, 1975), See also, S.Stichter, "The Formation of a Working Class in Kenya" in R.Sandbrooke and R.Cohen, (eds.), The Development of an African Working Class, (London: Longmann, 1975), S.Stichter, "Workers, Trade Unionists and Mau Mau Rebellion" in Canadian Journal of African Studies, Vol.9, No.2, 1975, and Stichter, "Trade Unionism in Kenya, 1947-1952: the Militant Phase," in P.C.W.Gutkind, R.Cohen and J.Copans (eds.), African Labour History, (London: Sage, 1978).

<sup>5</sup> A.C.Presley, "Labour Unrest Among Kikuyu Women in Colonial Kenya," in C.Robertson and Iris Berger (eds.), Women and Class in Africa, (New York: African Publishing Co., 1986). See also, S.Stichter, "Women and the Labour Force in Kenya, 1895-1964," in Rural Africana, 29, Spring, 1976, pp.45-67.

that the development of an African labour history must incorporate a labour history of women.<sup>6</sup> Indeed as C.Dennis has correctly stated, "it has, however, proved extremely difficult to incorporate into this perspective the experience of the great majority of African workers who are outside the wage labour sector in the peasant and petty commodity sector."<sup>7</sup> This theoretically invisible majority includes a large proportion of women and children. Stating the important role played by women in agricultural production, C.C.Wrigley observed that "the salient feature of the colonial era for Africans was undoubtedly a great increase in the total amount of work done by men and probably also (though this matter needs more investigation (emphasis mine)) by already heavily burdened women."<sup>8</sup> Ogot and Kitching concur with Wrigley's

---

<sup>6</sup> C.Dennis, "Women in African Labour History," Journal of Asian and African Studies, XXIII,1-2, 1988, pp.125-140. Studies on African women's labour contributions must, Dennis argues, look outside the boundaries of 'formal' labour history by focusing on women's household labour in the peasant economies and on the migrant labour 'native reserves' economies in Africa and finally on the development of petty commodity production in African societies in order to determine the place of women within the informal sector. See also C.Robertson, "Invisible Workers: African Women and the Problem of the Self-Employed in Labour History," Journal of Asian and African Studies, XXIII, 1-2, 1988, pp.180-198. Robertson maintains that women have been eliminated from consideration by the African labour historians because studies on African labour history have focused on wage earners.

<sup>7</sup> C.Dennis, "Women in African Labour History," p.125.

<sup>8</sup> C.C.Wrigley, "Aspects of Economic History of Africa," Cambridge History of Africa, 1907-1940, Vol.7, (ed.), by A.D.Roberts, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p.123.

point and they, along with others, have called for further research into the labour of women and to a lesser degree that of children.<sup>9</sup> In his review article on "Labour and Labour History in Africa" Bill Freund in a sub-section on "new frontiers of research" in African labour history, identified "the place of labour in agriculture, the so-called informal sector of the economy, and the African woman perceived as a worker,"<sup>10</sup> as urgent areas of research. All these three areas are interconnected with women occupying a central position. This plea has not been ignored. Some important work has been carried out on women in Kenya.<sup>11</sup> Surprisingly,

---

<sup>9</sup> G.N.Kitching, Class and Economic Change in Kenya: The Making of an African Petite-Bourgeoisie, 1905-1970, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980). See also, B.A.Ogot, "the Silences in the Old Narratives or New Trends in Cultural History," Paper presented during the Eastern African History Conference on "Social and Cultural History of Eastern Africa" in Naivasha, 12th-15th Nov. 1981, particularly pp. 8-9.

<sup>10</sup> Bill Freund, "Labour and Labour History in Africa," African Studies Review, Vol.27, No.2, 1984, p.27.

<sup>11</sup> A.P.Okeyo, "Daughters of the Lakes and Rivers: Colonization and the Land Rights of Luo Women," in M.Etienne and Leacock (eds.), Women and Colonization, (New York: Praeger, 1980). A.Pala, "The Changing Economic Position of Women in Rural Areas: Case Studies from Kisumu District, Kenya," Working Paper No.156, Institute for Development Studies, University of Nairobi, 1974. M.J.Hay "Luo Women and Economic Change During the Colonial Period," in Nancy Hafkin and Edna G.Bay (eds.), Women in Africa: Studies in Social and Economic Change, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976). See also Hay, "Women as Owners, Occupants, and Managers of Property in Colonial Western Kenya," in Margaret J.Hay and Marcia Wright (eds.), African Women and the Law: Historical Perspectives, (Boston: Boston University, 1982). Regina S.Oboler, Women, Power and Economic Change: The Nandi of Kenya, (Stanford University Press, 1985), M.Strobel, Muslim Women in Mombasa, 1890-1975, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), Kathleen Staudt, Agricultural Policy



no detailed research has been done on women and children's labour in rural agricultural economies in Eastern Africa.

Some studies have emphasized the importance of child labour and called for its investigation. M.J.Hay aptly pointed out the total neglect of the role of children's labour in agricultural economies. As she argued, "children's labour has clearly been an important factor in agriculture, in the household, in craft work and in trade."<sup>12</sup> Hay concludes that the subject has not received the attention it deserves.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Bill Freund, commenting on children's labour, observed, "child labour, which frequently has a relation to women's labour, barely exists as a subject in the scholarly literature although deservedly it has attracted the attention elsewhere of reformer and revolutionary alike."<sup>14</sup> This study has been undertaken with some of these considerations in mind.

---

Implementation: A Case Study from Western Kenya, (West Hartford: Kumarian Press, 1985), and L.White, "A History of Prostitution in Nairobi, Kenya C.1900-1952," Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Cambridge, 1983.

<sup>12</sup> M.J.Hay, "Recent Trends in African Economic History," Centre for African Studies, Dalhousie University, Working Paper No.4, 1985, p.4. She adds, "very little work has been done on the changing organisation of agricultural labour. Both the forms of domestic organisation and the details of farming practice vary widely across Africa, and it is very important for us to learn how these forms and practices have been transformed by commercialisation and changing agrarian structures," p.5.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid..

<sup>14</sup> Bill Freund, "Labour and Labour History in Africa" pp.35-36. He adds, on the work of children and far more so of women in its many facets, there is room for a large expansion of study and testing of ideas.

However, the importance of child labour is beginning to receive some attention.<sup>15</sup> So far studies on child labour have focused mainly on children's work in agriculture and herding, but rarely examine other duties which are not directly economically valued.<sup>16</sup> Indeed as P.Kongstad and M.Monsted state, "there are few studies taking up the work input of children and the sexual division of labour of children."<sup>17</sup> In addition, D.Kayongo-Male and P.Walji further pointed out the total neglect by scholars of the role children play in the family division of labour.<sup>18</sup> They suggest that studies of child labour should focus on, "which types of children help more at home, male or female, first born or

---

<sup>15</sup> D.Kayongo-male and p. Walji, Children and Work in Kenya, (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1984), see also, P.Kongsted and M.Monsted, Family Labour and Trade in Western Kenya, (Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1980).

<sup>16</sup> E.Schildkrout, "Dependence and Autonomy: The Economic Activities of Secluded Hausa Women in Kano, Nigeria," in E.Bay (ed.), Women and Work in Africa, (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1982), see also E.Schildkrout, "The Employment of Children in Kano" in Gerry Rogers and Guy Standing (eds.), Child Work, Poverty and Underdevelopment, (Geneva: I.L.O, 1981). In these two articles Enid Schildkrout illustrates the importance of child labour in the informal sector among the Islamic Hausa women in Nigeria. In Islamic West Africa, women cope with the constraint of seclusion by exploiting the time and effort of their children. Undoubtedly, children provide important support systems among women. For more information on Islamic women, see Margaret Strobel, Muslim Women in Mombasa Kenya, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).

<sup>17</sup> P.Kongstad and M.Monsted, Family Labour and Trade in Western Kenya, (Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1980), p.66.

<sup>18</sup> D.Kayongo-male and P.Walji, Children at Work in Kenya, (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1984), p.ix.

later-born, and why? What family characteristics determine the work children do at home? How does the larger societal environment influence children's work roles in the family?<sup>19</sup> Studies of the family division of labour for instance usually cover topics such as sex role differentiation in task allocation, but largely between husband and wife. No comprehensive effort has been made to study and understand how children fit into the family division of labour. In fact, peasant agriculture relies first and foremost on family labour which consists of a man, woman (wife), children and extended kin relations. Consequently, an examination of agricultural labour in rural economy must include children's labour contributions.

In most African societies, the organisation of labour was based on gender and age.<sup>20</sup> Gender studies have increasingly become interested in the sexual division of labour in society because, "it appears to express, embody, and to perpetuate female subordination."<sup>21</sup> Maureen Mackintosh adds, "gender division of labour often works to the detriment of women.

---

<sup>19</sup> Ibid..

<sup>20</sup> G.P. Murdock, Africa: Its People and their Culture History, (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1959), see also Gunter Wagner, The Bantu of Western Kenya, Vols. I-II, (London: Oxford University Press, 1970 and 1956).

<sup>21</sup> Maureen Mackintosh, "Gender Economics: The Sexual Division of Labour and the Subordination of Women," in Kate Young, Carol Wolkowitz and Roslyn McCullagh, Of Marriage and the Market: Women's Subordination in International Perspective, (London: CSE Books, 1981), p.2.

Women's subordination is thus imbedded in the gender division of labour."<sup>22</sup> However, the introduction of colonialism, which subsequently led to a high degree of commodity production, altered the division of labour. The impact of colonialism and its new mechanisms for extracting African wealth, strengthened African patriarchy with the imposition of western patriarchy, and worked to the detriment of women and to a lesser degree children. These changes have been uneven and varied, thus impeding useful generalisations about the gender and age division of labour in peasant production since the early colonial period. This is particularly true of women and children's labour. Consequently, specific case studies of peasant production are needed to explore changes in the labour process over time before a wider synthesis can be achieved.

Three things are attempted in this study. Using Western Province of Kenya as a case study, it tries to explore some of the themes which have been neglected in the study of African labour history. It hopes to provide new insights into the complexity of labour in rural agricultural production, the system of gender access to and control over resources and labour, modes of appropriation and property relations and women's responses. Finally, it tries to test some of the theories which have been developed in gender studies.

Western Province was chosen as the suitable study site because it has been rated by the Kenya government as a high

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p.3

potential agricultural region which has been heavily dependent on female and child labour. Western Province was also designated as a labour "reserve" during the colonial period. In addition, the trend of male out-migration has been maintained even in the post-independence period.

Throughout this thesis the term "patriarchy" is frequently employed, and it requires some comment. In using this term I intend to convey the concept of a system of political, social and economic authority in which males predominate, or indeed often monopolise, decision-making processes. The concept of patriarchy is one which will be familiar to readers of feminist literature. This literature, because most of it has emanated from Western Europe and North America, has tended to concentrate on the problem of reconciling Marxist interpretations of materialist history as based on class struggle with feminist concerns about gender discrimination. The problem was one to which even the male founders of marxism gave attention; Engels, in his Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, argued that, "in the family, the husband is the bourgeoisie and the wife the proletariat."<sup>23</sup> Not surprisingly, therefore, the concept of patriarchy has been examined by feminist writers largely in the context of western capitalist economy and social norms. For Heidi Hartmann patriarchy and capitalism co-exist in a

---

<sup>23</sup> F.Engels, The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, (New York: Pathfinder, 1970), p. 81.

symbiotic relation in capitalist society. Hartmann define patriarchy, "as a set of social relations between men, which have a material base, and which, though hierachical, establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women."<sup>24</sup> Hartmann argues:

The material base upon which patriarchy rests lies most fundamentally in men's control over women's labour power. Men maintain this control by excluding women from access to some essential productive resources.<sup>25</sup>

In this study of Western Province of Kenya, however, we are not dealing with a straightforward capitalist society. Nor can a single system of patriarchy be postulated. As the region became increasingly entwined in the institutions of colonial rule, influenced by the impact of capitalism, and subject to the cultural influence of missionaries and their churches and schools, it is possible to discern at least three forms of patriarchy. The bedrock was, and in large measure still is, the African extended family, with polygny common, in which women were made subordinate to a specifically African form of patriarchal ideology and control. As Claire Robertson argues for Ghana, "kinship structure is used in many societies to allocate power over resources, and that structure may

---

<sup>24</sup> Heidi Hartmann, "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union" in Lydia Sargent, (ed.), Women and Revolution, (Boston: South End, 1981), pp.14-15.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p.15. She adds, the material base of patriarchy, then does not rest solely on childbearing in the family but on all the social structures that enable men to control women's labour, see p.16.

entail systematically depriving certain groups of resources."<sup>26</sup> Kinship and lineage structures in Western Province confined women within extended families where they performed duties defined, controlled and appropriated by men. The subordination and control of women by African men was rooted in a material basis of patriarchal power, specifically by severely limiting their access to land. Women worked the land extensively, as labour, but did not control access to land or land use.

Colonial rule complicated the nature of patriarchy by introducing at least two new forms of it. Colonial rule was overwhelmingly male in impact. All colonial officials, at least until the very last stage of decolonization, were white males. They were supposedly "controlled" by a Colonial Office in London which was virtually a male club.<sup>27</sup> Colonial officialdom brought with it a concept of patriarchy rooted in British life. Ostensibly this included a paternalistic approach, based on nineteenth century labour legislation in Britain, that women should not be required or allowed to undertake heavy manual labour, or dangerous occupations, and that the state should be protective of their conditions of

---

<sup>26</sup> Claire Robertson, Sharing the Same Bowl: A Socioeconomic History of Women and Class in Accra, Ghana, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), p.11.

<sup>27</sup> Academic women in Britain, such as Margery Perham, began to have some influence on colonial policy as members of advisory committees in the 1930s. A few women were appointed as Colonial Office principals after 1940.

work and seek to prevent their exploitation. However, this same colonial bureaucracy felt the need to work within African "traditional culture". Their source of information about such "tradition" was, naturally enough, the African patriarchy itself. The African patriarchy became adept at "developing tradition" and playing on the fears of the white colonial bureaucracy that social order and discipline might well break down if "traditions" were not maintained. It will be seen that in this process efforts originating in the Colonial Office to impose controls designed to protect female and child labour were effectively stultified.

Missionaries represented a third type of patriarchy, for they too, though some were female, subscribed to a patriarchal concept of the moral order, which emphasised the Christian monogamous nuclear family and a distinctly Victorian morality greatly concerned with sexual behaviour. In many ways the missionaries acted as the most fervent critics of the way women (and children) were exploited as labour. Fundamentally, however, the missionary ethic was not anti-patriarchal; rather, it sought to substitute a British style Christian monogamous patriarchy for African norms.

This study attempts to investigate the gender and age divisions of labour within households in the Western Province of Kenya, and the influence of colonial capitalism upon the nature of patriarchy and women's work and their access to productive resources in society during the twentieth century.



Several different methodologies were used to obtain the relevant data for this study. The research involved an examination and analysis of documentary sources which were consulted at the Public Record Office (PRO) in London and the Kenya National Archives. Colonial missionary records were also examined and assessed. At the Public Record Office, a careful examination of all relevant sources of correspondence on labour problems in Kenya was made.

In Kenya, material was examined in the Kenya National Archives. This included data on agricultural production, annual reports, correspondence with the Secretary of State for the Colonies, labour censuses and handing over reports. Similarly, newspaper articles were also utilized.

The study of women and children's labour is complicated by scarcity of adequate statistical data. This labour has always been under-estimated and therefore in terms of recording, it is extremely difficult to get adequate documentation.

Archival research was complimented with participatory research and oral field interviews. The random sampling method was adopted for the oral interviews. Every first and fifth member of randomly selected households were interviewed in both Bungoma and Kakamega Districts. In every household, the head of the household (man or woman) and one child were interviewed.

Unfortunately for the historian, Western Province has not always been known by that name. Throughout the thesis I have often referred to the area by its contemporary name, and of course quotations from documents of the time always use the current official name. Until 1948 the area was called North Kavirondo. In 1948 the district was renamed North Nyanza. In 1956 it was split into two, the southern part became North Nyanza and the northern part Elgon Nyanza. In 1960 these were reunited as the present Western Province.

The area is the home of the Abaluyia communities which comprise seventeen subgroups. There are also pockets of Iteso to the West and Kalenjin (Bongomek, Bok and Kony) to the north in the Elgon area. The total area of Western Province is 3,054 sq. miles (7909.9 sq. km.).<sup>28</sup>

Western Province is situated to the north-east of lake Victoria on either side of the equator. The altitude of Western Province varies between 3,600 feet in the West near Busia and 7,500 feet on the slopes of Mt.Elgon. By far, the greatest part of Western Province lie between 4,500 and 5000 feet. It forms a well watered undulating plain gradually sloping away towards the west and slightly also towards the north as it rises again to the foot-hills of Mt.Elgon. To the north, Mt. Elgon, 14,178 feet high, is the single conspicuous feature in Western Province. Although the provincial

---

<sup>28</sup> Francis Ojany and Reuben B.Ogendo, Kenya: A study in Physical and Human Geography, (Nairobi: Longman, 1973), p.1.

boundaries have changed since Wagner wrote his book on the Bantu of Western Kenya, his description provides a vivid picture of Western Province. He wrote:

In the east and the north, the boundaries of the district are clearly marked by the Nandi escarpment and the slopes of Mt. Elgon. In the west the boundary line follows for many miles the course of the Malaba River, which also marks the Kenya and Uganda border. From the confluence of the Sanga and the Sio Rivers, onwards, the south-eastern and southern boundaries of the district are determined chiefly by the ethnical dividing line between Bantu and Nilotes.<sup>29</sup>

The province is sub-divided into three districts; Busia, Bungoma and Kakamega (see map III). This study focuses on Bungoma and Kakamega districts which formed the old North Kavirondo district. The population of Western Province was 1,328,298 in 1969 and this increased to 2,119,708 according to the 1979 population census in Kenya.

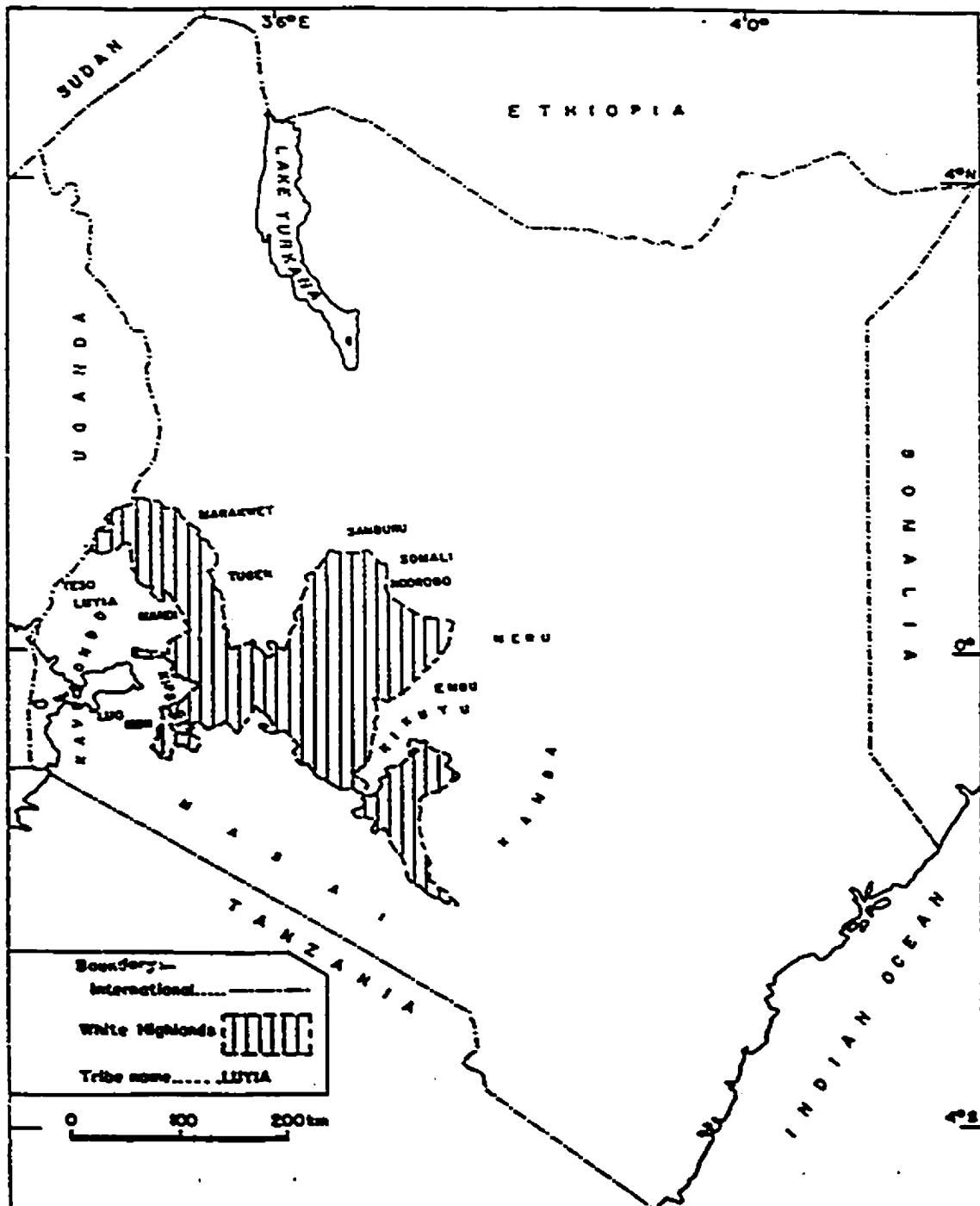
Western Province is a high potential agricultural area. It is well watered, with two distinct rain seasons: the long and short rain season. The annual rainfall varies from 61.7 to 76.3 inches. Kakamega District (especially Kaimosi and Maragoli regions get the heaviest rainfall 70-80 inches. Rainfall is heaviest between March and October, having the maximum in April/May and August/September. The main food crops are millet, cassava, sweet potatoes, groundnuts, maize, bananas, beans, peas and vegetables of which there are a

---

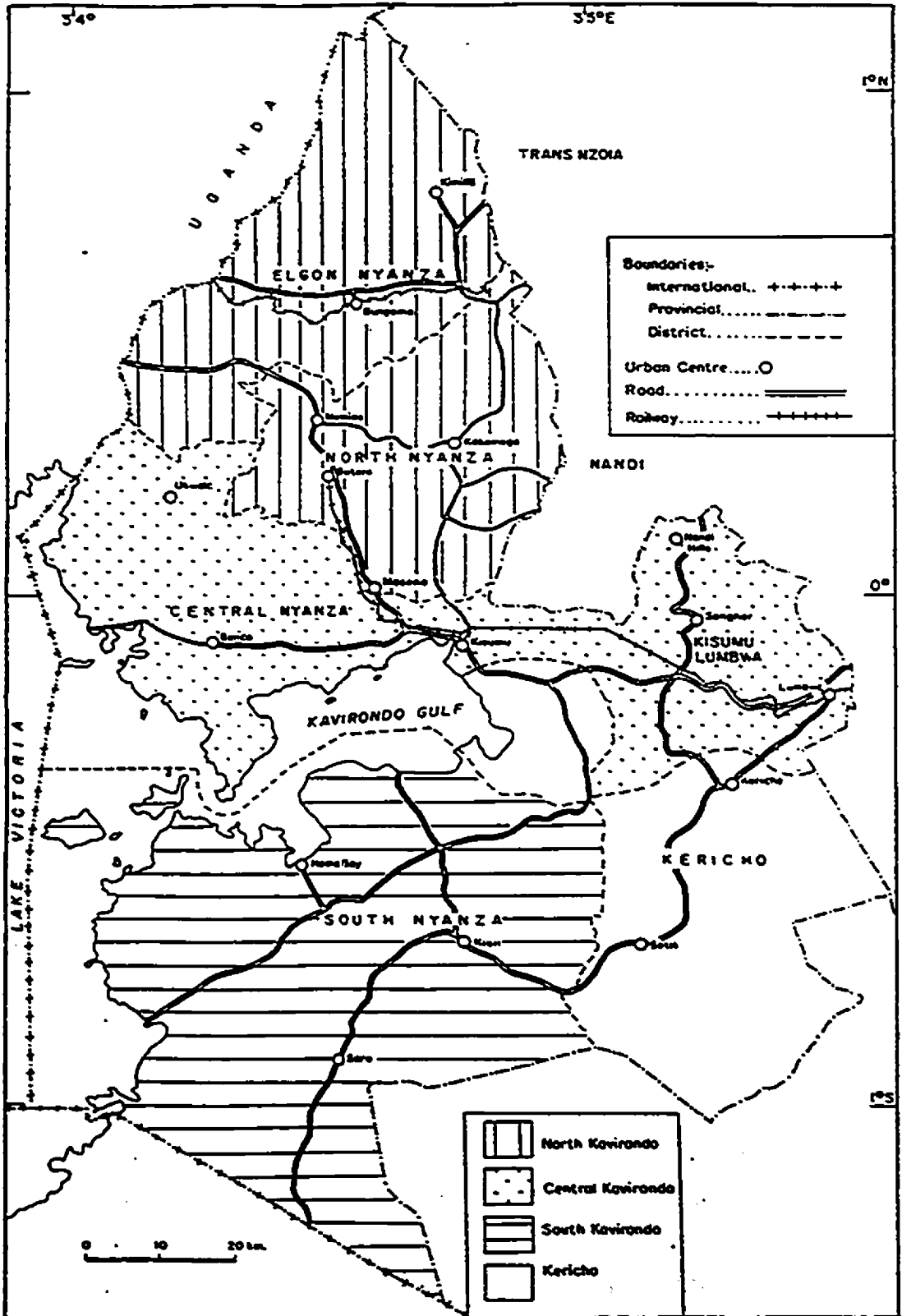
<sup>29</sup> Gunter Wagner, The Bantu of Western Kenya, Vol. 1, Published for International Africa Institute, (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp.19-20.

numerous varieties. However, maize has dominated the diet of most communities in the area. Most communities in Western Province kept cattle. The main cash crops in Western Province include cotton, coffee, tea, sugar cane, tobacco, maize, sisal and pyrethrum (see map 4). The significance of women and children's labour has to be examined within the context of these favourable conditions for agricultural production.

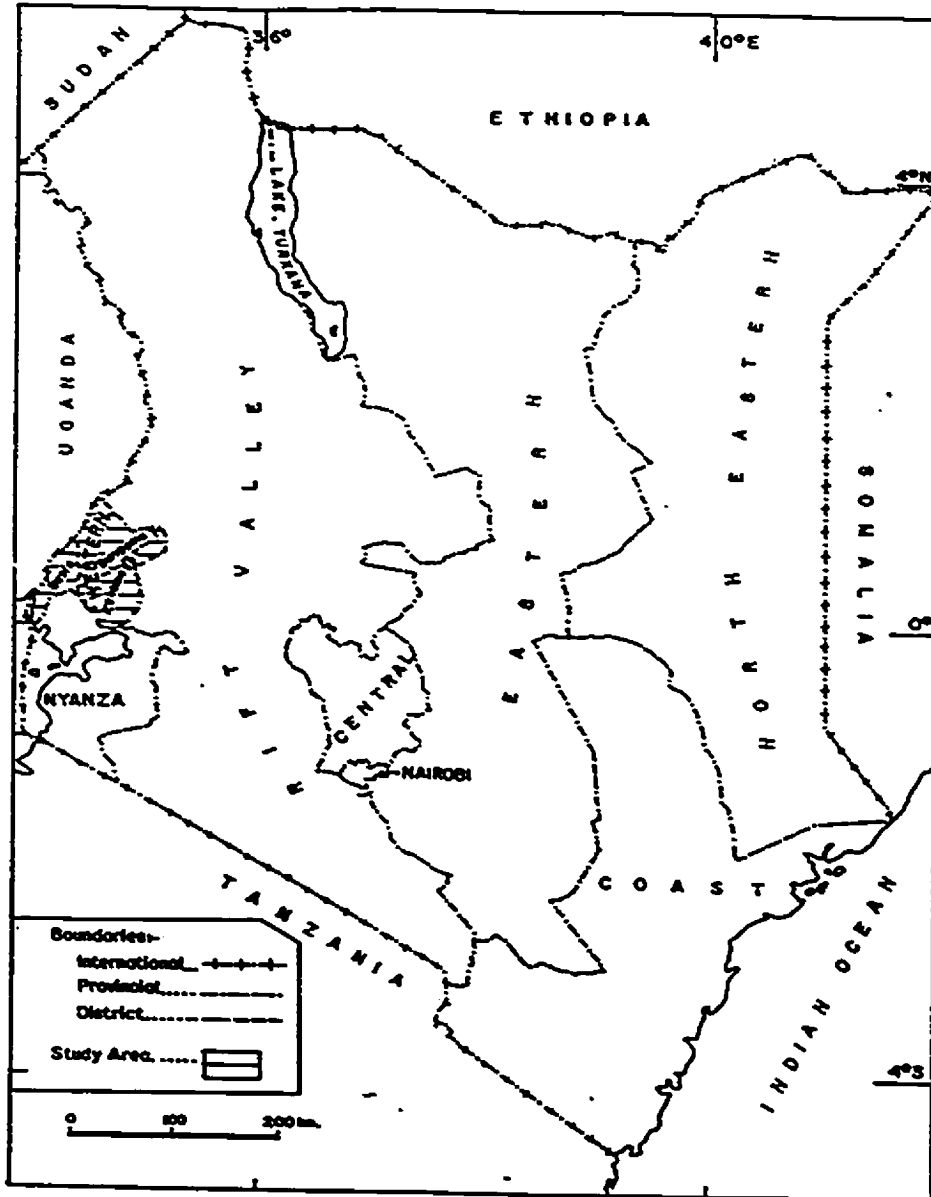
MAP I  
North Kavirondo in 1948



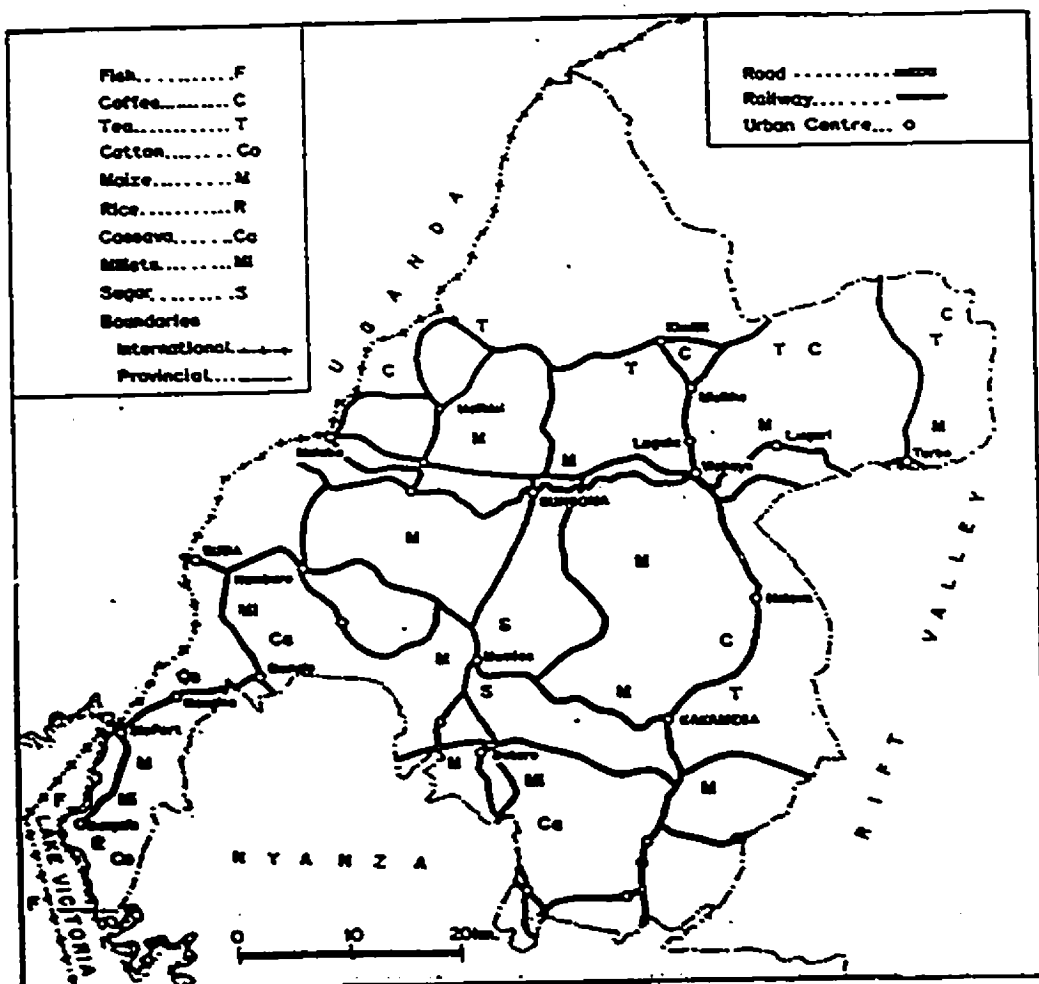
MAP II  
Western Province in 1956



Map III  
Western Province in 1985



MAP IV  
Main Food and Cash Crops in Western Province





## CHAPTER TWO

### Modes of Appropriation and Women's Property Rights in Western Province, 1902-1985

In this chapter, we argue that male elders' control over women's reproductive capacity strengthened their ability to control other forms of labour. Control over labour is crucial in all social formations. However, the mechanisms used by various communities have been different. Among the Abaluhya communities of Western Province, marriage which was solemnised through the payment of bridewealth gave male elders unquestioned access to the labour of women as wives and their children. This chapter will examine the mechanisms used by men to control female and child labour, how they benefitted, how they effected it and how women adjusted to it. Male control was exercised through the rules of pre-colonial property inheritance and reinforced by the land tenure system brought about by the colonial economy which seriously affected the position of women and children in the Western Province of Kenya.

### Modes of Appropriation and Control Over Female and Child Labour in Western Province

Among the Abaluhya communities of Western Province, the family was basically an economically self-sufficient group at the beginning of the 20th century. The wife and husband,

children and other dependents contributed to the economic maintenance of the family group by performing the tasks assigned to them by the traditional gender division of labour. Thus, the household fulfilled the dual function of production and reproduction.

The social relations of household-based production are frequently analyzed within the framework of a communal or primitive communist mode of production.<sup>1</sup> In this framework, the unit of production may be a single household or a group of related households, but whatever the size, all individuals born into extended kinship ideologically structured production units were expected to have equal access and rights to community resources. As Okoth-Ogendo explained:

The family continues to control access to the use of available land resources, supplies most of the labour input required and consumes more than 75 per cent of the produce. In the pre-colonial context, this economic form also provided the basis for the exercise of political authority and transmission of social and technical information from one generation to the next. These functions were exercised through a network of kinship arrangements and the performance of reciprocal obligations by members of given societies. In other words, power (both political and economic) was based essentially on control of land, the central factor in this type of economy.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> B. Hindess and P.Q. Hirst, Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), pp.21-78.

<sup>2</sup> H.W.O. Okoth-Ogendo, "The Changing System of Land Tenure And the Rights of Women," in Achola Pala, et al (ed.), The Participation of Women in Kenya Society, (Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1978), p. 133.

Therefore, male control over female and child labour was facilitated by male control over the means of production, land and cattle. Land was never owned in the western sense of the word. In fact, the concept of ownership with reference to land was unknown to Africans. Land was a communal property. However land use and land administration were vested in clan elders who were usually male, even though "the power of allocation was not equivalent to ownership".<sup>3</sup> This was mainly a result of a combination of patriarchal and patrilineal traditions which characterised many African societies.

Many scholars and policy makers have assumed communal possession of the means of production implies that there was no basis for denying any family member, either on the basis of gender or any other consideration, i.e marital status, free access to the means of production. Thus, there was no material basis for intra-household exploitation and inequality. However, Hindess and Hirst point out the crucial role played by elders and male adults in the control of the labour process. They stated:

possession in the sense of the effective capacity to set the means of production to work may reside at various levels within the community...For example, elders and adults of various statuses may supervise and co-ordinate the labour of those ranked below them in the lineage.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Okoth-Ogendo, "The Changing System of Land Tenure" p.134.

<sup>4</sup> Hindess and Hirst, Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production, p.50.

This control over the means of production enabled male elders to control female and child labour but the most important question to investigate is the validity of communal access to the means of production. In a critique of the communal mode of production, Jeanne Henn argued: "if the communal mode of production is to be legitimately employed in the analysis of family, household, or lineage-based production, communal possession of the means of production must be demonstrated rather than merely asserted. One would expect communal possession to denote situations in which all adult members of a community participate in decisions concerning the use of the means of production."<sup>5</sup> However, Okoth-Ogendo argues that such assumptions are based on misconceptions about the nature of African land tenure because, "the power of allocation itself was simply an aspect of land use administration and not a proprietary right. As such, it was always qualified by the rights of access held by members of that community. Security of tenure was based on the fact of use alone."<sup>6</sup> The fact that powers of allocation were conferred on men alone bears testimony to the patriarchal ideology of patrilineal societies. This also reinforced the importance of patriarchal structures in African societies, and

---

<sup>5</sup> Jeanne Koopman Henn, "The Material Basis of Sexism: A Model of Production Analysis," in S.B. Stichter and J.L. Parpart (eds), Patriarchy And Class: African Women in the Home and the Workforce, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1988), p. 37.

<sup>6</sup> For more details see, Okoth-Ogendo, "The Changing System of Land Tenure," p. 134.

affected the system of rights of inheritance. Women's use of land was guaranteed. Indeed, as Achola Pala suggested:

...because of the basic orientation toward subsistence requirements, it was beneficial to the family and village community for women to realize their land and livestock rights.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, pre-colonial communal systems recognised women's crucial contribution to food production and provided the land for that activity. This contributed significantly to women's economic security and stability in land use rights but these rights depended on their role as wife and mother and were allocated and controlled by men.

Male control over female and child labour was a result of their control over land-use allocation rights. The allocation of land to individual members of the clan or lineage was determined by the culture of individual kinship/clan or lineage groups. But in practical terms, the family plot was not owned by the family per se. Ownership of the family plot finally passed into an exclusive ownership by the head of the family because the bulk of important land use and disposal capabilities lay in the hands of individual male household heads. Women used land but never controlled it.

---

<sup>7</sup> Achola Pala, African Women in Rural Development: Research Trends And Priorities, OLC Paper No.2, (Washington D.C., Overseas Liaison Committee, American Council on Education, 1976), p.20.

The Abaluhya of Western Province are a patrilineal community.<sup>8</sup> The power of land use administration was conferred on male elders (Omwami we lichabe among the Bukusu and Liguru among the Maragoli and other Luhya communities in Kakamega district). Indeed, as the Committee on Native Land Tenure in North Kavirondo (Western Province) reserve explained:

...the Native customary unity of land administration is the lugongo (ridge). Each lugongo is under the patriarchal rule of an elder who is known as the liguru and whose function is to keep the peace, to protect the land and its occupants, and to settle any disputes which may arise.<sup>9</sup>

Land was strictly allocated to male adults of the clan or lineage. As the Committee on Native Land Tenure stated: "each family has exclusive rights of occupation and usufruct over its own holding, and these rights pass by inalienable

---

<sup>8</sup> Dora Earthy's study on women's land rights observed that, in a patrilineal society as the Lenge, women did not have formal power. This compares well with the situation of women in Western Province. For further analysis, see Dora Earthy, Valenge Woman, (London: Frank Cass, 1968). For additional information and analysis of the Abaluhya system of land tenure, see G. Wagner, The Bantu of Western Kenya Vol. II: The Economic Life, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), pp. 75-100. Additional information on the system of land tenure among the Abaluhya was provided by Norman Humphrey, The Liguru And the Land: Sociological Aspects of Some Agricultural Problems of North Kuvirondo, (Nairobi: Kenya Government Printer, 1947), pp.19-27.

<sup>9</sup> CO 533/409/17, Report of Committee on Native Land Tenure in the North Kavirondo Reserve, October, 1930, p.4, para.12.

right from father to son."<sup>10</sup> Therefore, although land continued to be treated as communal property, the administration of parcels allocated to individual households for use was the responsibility of men in their capacity as heads of households. Obviously, all rights in land were derived from clan membership and inheritance.

Certainly, male elders exercised considerable control over land and cattle. They controlled women's access to both. Male elders' control over land included uncultivated land which was considered as the clan's possible area for future expansion. As a result male elders enjoyed a powerful status in society. Indeed, as Wagner observed among the Abaluhya of Western Province, "only men can own land, just as only men can own cattle."<sup>11</sup> In addition, C.W. Hobbley explained that, "each wife in an African family usually has dedicated to her particular use a certain number of cattle, they are not her property, but she has the sole disposal of their milk for use of her children."<sup>12</sup> Again, a woman's cattle rights were usually usufructuary and therefore limited to consumption. Hence women enjoyed usufructuary rights in land and cattle.

---

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp.4-5, para.16. Similarly, Angelique Haugerud observed that individuals in Embu (men) acquired land through first cultivation (or runo rights), in addition land in pre-colonial Embu was inherited by one or more of a man's sons. See "Land Tenure and Agrarian change in Kenya," in Africa Journal of the International Institute, 59,1 (1989), p.74.

<sup>11</sup> Wagner, II op.cit., p.86.

<sup>12</sup> C.W. Hobbley, Bantu Beliefs and Magic, (London: Frank Cass, 1967), p.279.

As a result, the Committee which investigated the system of land tenure among the Abaluhya of Western Province stated:

...no woman can hold personal occupation rights over land. Any rights which she may exercise in respect of the land of her own clan are derived from her male relations, and in respect of land belonging to her husband's clan, from her husband. A widow cultivates parts she has previously cultivated while her children are growing up.<sup>13</sup>

This enabled male heads of households to appropriate the surplus value generated by women and children's labour.<sup>14</sup>

In the communal farmland, each man was allocated a plot. The man in turn divided his plot into strips according to the number of wives he had. In a monogamous home, the piece which was allocated to a man was automatically cultivated by his wife. But she could also lend out portions of that land to other women who needed to plant potatoes, sorghum, green peas, eleusine and simsim. Women had absolute control over the disposal of such crops. This was a survival strategy which enabled women in Western Province to establish some control over their own labour and thus the disposal of surplus grain. This survival strategy worked well for the Bukusu women in Bungoma district but was not used effectively by women in Kakamega district because intense population pressure

---

<sup>13</sup> Report of the Committee on Native Land Tenure in the North Kavirondo Reserve, p.6, para.22. In addition, see KNA, File No. DC.NN/10/1, Political Associations, 1926-40.

<sup>14</sup> Explaining the situation among the Kikuyu, Patricia Stamp argued that "male elders appropriated the labour of women and young men" as well as making decisions on access to the corporately owned land." Technology, Gender and Power in Africa, Technical Study 63e, (Ottawa: IDRC, 1989), p.78.



increased the demand for land. In the case of polygamous households, the husband was expected to allocate sufficient land to each wife. As Wagner in his study of pre-colonial and therefore traditional behaviour stated:

In a polygamous family each wife is apportioned a separate field, the Omulimi gwa guga usually being allotted to the great or senior wife and plots of decreasing size to the junior wives, although adjustments would later be made in accordance with the number of children in each house.<sup>15</sup>

Under this system, women's security of tenure was enhanced by the fact that as a wife she was entitled to a parcel of land over which she had paramount authority as a cultivator. Therefore land was not allocated to women as individuals by clan elders but through their husbands.

In a polygamous family each wife in time established her own separate household which was the primary unit of production. The work group within the household consisted of the wife and her children with occasional support from the husband and extended relations. Children in a polygamous family were grouped with their mothers and they ate and also shared primarily in the house and garden-work of their mother's household. In Western Province, especially among the

---

<sup>15</sup> Omulimi gwa guga is the garden of the grandfather i.e. that piece of land which the household head inherited from his own father when he established his household as distinct from other lands that he might have acquired later on. See Wagner, I and II, op.cit., pp.49, and 86.

Bukusu, co-wives often cultivated their gardens jointly.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, women in polygamous households had several advantages as P. Stamp's vivid summary states:

...the polygamous household may offer women a basis for solidarity and task-sharing. At the household level, co-wives co-operate to organise production, consumption and child care. Although friction between co-wives is widely reported, many studies stress the economic and political advantages of polygamy, including the autonomy made possible by shared responsibility.<sup>17</sup>

Indeed, additional wives and numerous offsprings were valued not only by the males but by the senior women for the extra labour they provided.

The general economic structure required extra labour which was provided by wives and children. Polygamy was therefore encouraged for economic reasons. Additional labour was the essential means of increasing production. As Jean Hay very clearly states, "so long as land was abundant and labour

---

<sup>16</sup> Sara Nabwala, Wamono (Bungoma) oral Interview, 14/2/1988. See also Wagner, I, op.cit., p.51. Wagner suggested that "the senior wife exercised a certain amount of authority over her co-wives especially during the first year or two after a young wife's marriage, when the latter has not yet established a household of her own. In all joint activities of the co-wives, however, the senior wife continues to take precedence and co-wives generally show her the respect due to a senior relative.

<sup>17</sup> Patricia Stamp, Technology, Gender and Power in Africa, p.77. Polygamy, observed Christine Obbo, afforded some women leverage within a male-dominated descent system. However, jealousy existed between co-wives. See African Women: Their Struggle for Economic Independence, (London: Zed Press, 1980), p.35. On the question of jealousy among and between co-wives, Wagner suggests that "the preference given by most husbands to a 'favoured wife' constitutes a frequent occasion for jealousy and strife among co-wives." Wagner, Vol. II, p.54.

was the limiting factor, such a division of labour contributed to the high social valuation of polygyny and the desire for numerous offspring."<sup>18</sup> Among the Abaluhya the desire for numerous children was summarised in the saying, "where there are many children there will always be plenty of food."<sup>19</sup> Thus the appropriation of female and child labour by male heads of households was used to enhance their own social status in society. Wealth, which was defined in terms of cattle, wives and numerous children was a fundamental proof for political leadership and prestige. The wives, argued Jean Hay, provided the economic surplus necessary for extensive entertaining and for acquiring a reputation for generosity.<sup>20</sup>

Land use allocation varied with a wife's work capacity. The size of the strip per wife depended on the industry of the woman who cultivated it. This meant that more industrious women got larger plots than those less so. In Western Province, a husband apportioned to his wife one or two fields to grow food crops on behalf of the household. As the Committee on Land Tenure stated:

each wife sows and weeds her separate crop and harvests it, and is assisted by her husband and

---

<sup>18</sup> Margaret Jean Hay, "Economic Change in Luoland: Kowe, 1895-1945," Ph.D. Thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1972, pp.102-103. In addition Jean Hay observed that wives could then provide the economic surplus necessary for extensive entertaining and for acquiring a reputation for generosity.

<sup>19</sup> Wagner, I, *op.cit.*, p.47.

<sup>20</sup> Hay, "Economic Change in Luoland," p.93.

family. The produce belongs to the husband and he must build the grain store.<sup>21</sup>

The food crops from these fields were kept in the family store. The woman had limited disposal rights over these crops.

In fact, a man retained a certain number of plots for himself depending on the availability of labour. In rich households, additional labour was obtained from the extended family relations, friends and communal labour (ekitayi). Payment of communal labour was usually in kind (in the form of beer and food parties). Communal labour from friends was based on reciprocal relationships. Consequently, only rich men who could afford to provide elaborate entertainment at the end of a day's work engaged additional labour. Extra labour was obviously crucial for increasing production.

In addition to one or two fields apportioned to a wife by a husband, the Abaluhya women had access to Libubi (sg) or (Kamabubi (pl)) and Mwikunda or (Likunda (sg.)) fields. Libubi was a small field where individual women grew a variety of vegetables and sometimes tobacco. The size of libubi fields depended largely on the industry of individual women. As one informant observed, "a hard-working woman expanded her libubi into a big plot. Her husband could not interfere as long as a woman performed her work well. However, a large

---

<sup>21</sup> Report of the Committee on Native Land Tenure in North Kavirondo, p.7, para.25. See also Wagner, The Bantu of Western Kenya, Vol.II, pp.86-87.

libubi created much work for a woman because she only worked on her libubi during her spare-time.<sup>22</sup> Mwikunda (likunda) was a field which was usually established in the old kraal or homestead site. Kamabubi and Mwikunda fields belonged to women. It is here that women exercised their complete authority as cultivators. Hence, the Committee on Land Tenure observed:

In the second place, a woman cultivates additional crops entirely by herself in which case she has the right of disposal of that produce although her husband may have helped her with the first clearing.<sup>23</sup>

The location of the libubi field provided strategic advantages to individual women. Kamabubi were close to the house (what one could describe as a kitchen gardens in Western societies). All household manure was deposited there. Hence, Kamabubi fields were the most fertile plots in any farmland. Production on these fields was therefore maximum. Because of the close proximity of Kamabubi fields to the house, women were able to work on the fields whenever they had a slight opportunity to do so. It was also a field where women could easily combine and fulfil multiple tasks, especially domestic labour. Therefore, the existence of these fields enabled women to establish some control over their labour and the disposal of the surplus grain. Obviously, only industrious

---

<sup>22</sup> Luka Namulala, Oral Interview, Musese, 14/9/1987.

<sup>23</sup> Report of the Committee on Native Land Tenure, p.7, para.25.

women benefitted from Kamabubi and Mwikunda fields. Bananas were usually grown in Mwikunda fields. Small wonder that Abaluhya women have continued to dominate trading activities involving bananas and vegetables. Each woman had her own separate grain stores. These included: 1) Kitera - the reserve store of grain which was added to, from time to time and which may only be drawn upon in times of shortage. 2) Ekiagi - the household food-store for daily use. 3) Tsinzoka (singular: Inzoka) - large pots standing five or six feet high in which was stored grain over which the woman had the right of disposal.<sup>24</sup> Produce from Kamabubi and Mwikunda fields were stored in Tsinzoka.

Kamabubi and Mwikunda fields were both for economic and strategic advantages. The economic advantages were obvious. In Western Province, the Abaluhya women had total control over the crop pattern and disposal of the surplus grain from these fields. In fact, as some informants reported, "industrious women barunda (i.e. exchanged their surplus grain for chicken, goats or sheep) which they later exchanged for cattle."<sup>25</sup>

Women have suffered because accumulation of surplus was best held as cattle, and that was not a mechanism they could control. It was at this point that women diverted, perhaps for lack of an appropriate system of property accumulation,

---

<sup>24</sup> Report of the Committee on Native Land Tenure, p.7, para.25.

<sup>25</sup> Johnstone Khisa, Kimilili, Oral Interview, 5/2/1988; and Luka Namulala, Musese, Oral Interview, 14/9/1987.

because traditionally women could not own cattle. Therefore, women who accumulated cattle without their husbands' interference used them for the payment of their sons' bridewealth and later when schools were introduced, sold them to pay school fees for their sons and sometimes their daughters. Payment of bridewealth was the man's responsibility. As a result, women's contributions reduced the burden of men exceedingly. However, only strong-minded women managed to accumulate property in the form of cattle. Sometimes, a husband could also dispose of the wife's cattle without consulting her. In some extreme cases, a man used his wife's cattle to pay bridewealth for subsequent wives. This was the most oppressive mode of male appropriation of women's property. Women's limited access and control over valuable property such as cattle was a key means of social control which significantly contributed to their low economic status in society.

In some cases, a woman borrowed a piece of land from another woman in the neighbourhood. This enabled her to produce surplus grain which was not declared to the husband. This was a clear case of female solidarity in rural economies, but it required extra labour. As one elderly female informant (72 years old) stated, "only ambitious, hard-working women managed to cope with additional labour responsibilities."<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> Sara Nabwala, Oral Interview, Wamono, (Bungoma), 14/2/1988.

Women's independent cultivation of Kamabubi and Mwikunda fields was another strategy to protect their interests within the constraints of male control over allocation of land use and disposal of property. But, because of lack of an appropriate mode of accumulation of surplus, women's property eventually might be appropriated by male heads of households.

#### Appropriation of Female and Child Labour

Mature girls (marriageable age) were allocated land to cultivate by their fathers. But they had limited control over the products of their labour. Hence, the Committee on Land Tenure in North Kavirondo observed:

When the girl grows up her father may allot to her some of his mugunda (land) to cultivate separately, but the produce must be taken to the family grain store. Should the girl wish to sell or barter any of it, she must get her father's permission.<sup>27</sup>

Among the Bukusu of Bungoma district, Wagner claims, girls were given their own gardens at the age of fourteen. The crops raised by them were stored in a special granary which after their marriage were ceremoniously "opened" by their fathers in-law and served to give them a start in their own household.<sup>28</sup> Girls in Bukusuland used to get married at the age of 18 to 21 years. The suggestion by Wagner that they used to be given strips of land at the age of fourteen years

---

<sup>27</sup> CO 533/409/17, p.6, para.23.

<sup>28</sup> Wagner, I, op.cit., pp.47-50.



was probably inaccurate. Furthermore, girls did not dispose of the surplus from their strips of land.

The produce from the girls' strip of land was stored separately from the mother's. In case of famine, the father of the girl would exchange the girl's produce for an animal. Such animals were usually given names such as Nasiaki (granary). If such a thing happened, then the acquired animal belonged to the father and not to the girl. This shows that the Abaluhya society was, and still is, very patriarchal. Although young men were also exploited by elders, they at least received a small share of what they produced. Bridewealth was always paid for them by their fathers, usually in cattle. Cattle were used because they were considered a better method of storing wealth derived from surplus grain. Cattle were the traditional bank, the main form of wealth recognised by Abaluhya society. As a result, ownership of cattle was restricted to the class of patriarchs, which placed male heads of households in a better position to control the labour of male dependents.<sup>29</sup> The value of cattle as a measurement of wealth, and as a status symbol was extended to represent a measurement of labour value provided by women and their reproductive capacity.

---

<sup>29</sup> For instance, among the Embu, Angelique Haugerud, observed that "the father's right to decide how his wealth is to be distributed among his sons is an important source of influence and control over their behaviour. See "Land Tenure and Agrarian Change in Kenya," pp.69-70.

The distribution of women was regulated through the payment of bridewealth. Large numbers of cattle were usually required for the bridewealth payment. In order to obtain the necessary cattle, young men had to work for male elders. Thus, control over marriage arrangements gave patriarchs the means to control the labour and appropriate the surplus value generated by male dependents. At the level of ideology, traditions required that a son should show respect to his father, do his bidding and fear him. However, behind these traditions were concrete relations of production which by the end of the 19th century had changed to means of appropriation and exploitation. Ironically, the father's payment for his sons' bridewealth was produced by the whole family, but its disposal was determined by the father alone.

In practice, the payment of bridewealth justified male appropriation and control over female and children's surplus labour value. Similar observations were made by Margaret Jean Hay among the Luo.<sup>30</sup> For instance, Barbara Rogers specifically pointed out that "among most cattle-owning peoples of Africa, for example, marriage is legalized by the

---

<sup>30</sup> C.M. Clark, "Land and Food, Women and Power in Nineteenth Century Kikuyu," in Africa, 50, 4 (1980), pp.357-369.; and Margaret Jean Hay, "Luo Women and Economic Change During the Colonial Period," in N.J. Hafkin and Edna G. Bay (eds.) Women in Africa: Studies in Social and Economic Change, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976), pp.87-110.

transfer of cattle from the husband's lineage to the wife's."<sup>31</sup> Marriage ceremonies reflected the labour value of women and their children. In both cases marriage was sanctioned by the payment of bridewealth. Observations made by Jean Hay among the Luo underscores the importance of women's labour value in any marriage arrangements:

Women's labour was the critical element in determining the standard of living of the household, and marriage thus represented the most significant form of investment for a man requiring as it did the experience of considerable capital in the form of bridewealth.<sup>32</sup>

The payment of bridewealth was a form of labour compensation to the extended family of the girl. Cattle ownership, J. Depelchin adds, determined the form of surplus appropriation because cattle owners resorted to a mechanism of cattle exchange or transfer to consolidate a relationship between two previously unrelated families.<sup>33</sup> Consequently, domination of females and their subordination is more thorough among cattle owning societies. The woman's labour contribution was therefore central in any marriage arrangements. Hence, behind every wealthy man in society was and still is a reflection of

---

<sup>31</sup> Barbara Rogers, Domestication of Women: Discrimination in Developing Countries, (London: Tavistock Publishers, 1980), p.123 as quoted from Lucy Mair, Marriage, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p.31.

<sup>32</sup> Margaret Jean Hay, "Luo Women and Economic Change," pp.93-94.

<sup>33</sup> J. Depelchin, "African History and the Ideological Reproduction of Exploitative Relations of Production," in African Development, Vol.11, 1977.

the successful appropriation of surplus labour value of women and children. And Jean Hay adds, "the nineteenth century descriptions of wealth and wealthy men reflect the labour value of women and not simply the ownership of livestock."<sup>34</sup>

The economic importance of women was the basis of polygamous marriages in Western Province and elsewhere in Africa.<sup>35</sup> Additional wives were considered a source of extra labour: they themselves and the children they would bear were seen as a source of wealth, that is, producing grain which could be exchanged for cattle and reproducing daughters to marry off, also in exchange for cattle. In fact, the economic importance of women was also influential in a man's choice of a wife. In explaining the qualities a man would look for in the choice of a wife, one informant stated: "cultural expectations of what society considered as the ideal woman, hard working and generally industrious."<sup>36</sup> Therefore, a woman's marriage triggers a social expectation that she will perform the labour tasks culturally defined as the obligations of a wife and mother.

For a young man, marriage symbolized the beginning of a transformation period in which he attained the right to

---

<sup>34</sup> Hay, "Luo Women and Economic Change," pp.93-94.

<sup>35</sup> For a more insightful analysis of polygamy among the Abaluhya of Western Province, see Wagner, 1, *op.cit.*, pp.48-52. See particularly footnote No.1 on page 50 where a table on polygynous homesteads in Western Province is provided.

<sup>36</sup> Luka Namulala, Oral Interview, Chwele, Bungoma, 1988.

appropriate the labour and reproductive potential of others, initially that of his first wife. Men in most African societies were only allocated land at marriage. Explaining the situation among the Abaluhya, Wagner pointed out, "after a son has established his own household, the father gives him a 'cow for milk' and apports to him a piece of land which his daughter-in-law may till."<sup>37</sup> This was a clear implication that a woman's participation was essential in proper land management.<sup>38</sup> As Jean Henn stated, "before marriage, a man has no means of creating his own sphere of dependents, his labour and its products are controlled by the patriarch upon whom he depends."<sup>39</sup> In addition, through marriage, a man develops his own entourage of dependent wives and children, and he becomes a full fledged member of the exploiting class.<sup>40</sup> Male appropriation of female and child labour increased their wealth and thus improved their social status in society. While marriage liberated young men from exploitation by the privileged elders in society, it intensified the exploitation and domination of women in society. Before a woman marries, Wagner reported about the Abaluhya, her father (or his substitute) is her legal

---

<sup>37</sup> Wagner, II, op.cit., p.48.

<sup>38</sup> Rogers, Domesticatization, p.123.

<sup>39</sup> Henn, "The Material Basis" p.40.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid..

guardian. After marriage the guardianship is divided between the father and the husband.<sup>41</sup>

The system of redistribution of the products of family labour discriminated against women and daughters. Laws of inheritance and property rights worked to their detriment. In addition, Jeanne Henn points out, "on a lifetime basis, males appropriated more surplus labour than they provided as dependents of the patriarchal class."<sup>42</sup> Indeed, as Molyneux argues, although young men were also exploited by elders, they at least received a small share of what they produced because their bridewealth was paid for by their fathers.<sup>43</sup> But women, who were and (still are) the major producers, did not receive a share of what they produced. Jeanne Henn underlines the differentiation in terms of young male and female exploitation in society when she states, "female dependence on patriarchs is ideologically defined as permanent and male dependence is temporarily limited to the early years of their life cycle. Thus, the female segment of the subordinate class is more thoroughly dominated and exploited than the male segment."<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup> Wagner, The Bantu of Western Kenya, II, pp.46-47.

<sup>42</sup> Henn, "The Material Basis of Sexism," pp.39-45.

<sup>43</sup> M. Molyneux, "Androcentricism in Marxist Anthropology," in Critique of Anthropology, No.3, 1977.

<sup>44</sup> Henn, "The Material Basis" p.39.

It has been argued that women's limited access to the productive resources in society combined with their lack of complete control over their own labour power weakened their ability to accumulate wealth. In addition, the payment of bridewealth which was a form of labour compensation to the extended family of the girl further incapacitated women's ability to control their own labour. Indeed, the system of bridewealth legitimized male appropriation of female and child labour. In addition, women's ability to accumulate was inhibited by their inability to inherit property, and their lack of free access to productive resources. Clearly in patrilineal and exogamous societies like the Abaluhya, men had power over the fruits of women and children's labour because patriarchal traditions gave them a privileged position over women and children. Male appropriation of female and child surplus labour value was therefore culturally defined and defended, and translated into severe limitations on women's ability to accumulate property themselves.

Laws of Inheritance: Women and Children's Property Rights

The Abaluhya are a patrilineal and exogamous society. The laws of inheritance of any form of property were largely defined along male lines of descendants. Basically, the status of sons and daughters differed with regard to the inheritance of family property. When a man died his land was divided among his sons and not among his daughters.<sup>45</sup> From the father, a cow or a parcel of land was passed over to his sons and later to his grandsons. In fact, this is what Wagner observed in 1939 when he stated, "men had an upper hand in inheritance."<sup>46</sup> Women's rights of inheritance were further eroded by the system whereby women were also inherited as if they were part and parcel of the property. Wagner has explained this with regard to the Abaluhya when he stated:

Claims to inheritance extended a) to the property of the deceased in livestock (cattle, goats, sheep); b) in land c) in utensils of personal and domestic use (weapons, tools, implements and ornaments & c and d) to the rights which the deceased possessed in respect of his wife or wives (on the strength of having paid marriage cattle for them).<sup>47</sup>

After the father's death, the sons of the senior wife (especially in polygynous families) may "inherit" i.e. marry

---

<sup>45</sup> Timeteo Wepukhulu and Luka Namulala, Oral Interviews, 5/11/1987, and 14/9/1987, Bungoma.

<sup>46</sup> Gunter Wagner, The Changing Family Among the Bantu of Western Province, (London: O.U.P., 1970), p.30.

<sup>47</sup> Wagner, The Bantu of Western Kenya, Vol.1, p.84.



the junior wife.<sup>48</sup> The payment of bridewealth provided the right to such "inheritance." Furthermore, some women were inherited as if they were part of the deceased man's property, which reduced their ability to inherit property themselves.

The legal position of the wife was also inferior to that of the husband with regard to her property rights as well as her claims over her own children. She had no ownership status whatsoever.<sup>49</sup> Thus, the system of bridewealth demolished women's property rights including the rights over their own children. Children belonged to their father's clan. Therefore, payment of bridewealth helped to consolidate male authority over the wife and her offspring. It was also the basis of male control and appropriation of female and child labour. As Wagner very adequately argued:

The low status of the wife with regard to property is paralleled by the fact that she has no rights over her children in her capacity as a mother. If the marriage is dissolved, even if entirely owing to the husband's fault, the wife can under no circumstances claim any of her children, in the sense that she would have a right to take them with her to her father's house or to her new husband and there bring them up.<sup>50</sup>

In fact, the system of patrilineal inheritance was also related to women's contribution and participation in rural economies. Among the Abaluhya, the allocation and distribution of productive resources was influenced by the

---

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p.52.

<sup>49</sup> Wagner, The Changing Family, p.45.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p.46.

gender division of labour in society. Hence land arrangements recognized women's usufruct rights in land they were assigned to cultivate. But such allocation of property, like land and cattle, did not give the woman the right to inherit. It appears to have only affected the position of her male children. Land and cattle allocated to individuals were for the production of food for their households. However, property - land, cattle, goats, sheep and any moveables or both- assigned to a particular wife was inherited by her sons. Indeed, property allocated to individual houses was protected by the customary law which recognized women's usufruct rights in land and cattle. Therefore, while inheritance was patrilineal, specific rights in the patrimony were transmitted through women, whose status as wives was important in determining the inheritance of their sons. Among the Abaluhya, land cultivated by an individual woman was thus distributed to her sons. This system of inheritance encouraged subdivisions in land. The colonial officials opposed this system because it increased fragmentation and created uneconomic land units.

Similarly, in patrilineal descent systems, the laws of inheritance and property rights follow the house-property complex.<sup>51</sup> The house-property complex recognized the fact

---

<sup>51</sup> J. Goody and J. Buckley, "Inheritance and Women's Labour in Africa," in *Africa*, Vol.63, 1973, pp.108-121. The extended family, argued Goody and Buckley, is divided into more or less independent units called houses, which consist of a wife and her children, organized for property use and

that the sons of one woman as opposed to sons of a co-wife, might have specific rights connected with the distribution of that part of the husband's property which their mother herself has worked. Certainly, the house-property pattern of inheritance was a characteristic feature of polygynous households.<sup>52</sup> Under the house-property system, all cattle allocated to a house by the head of the family or acquired through exchange or barter of surplus grain by household members became the property of the house and could not be alienated or transferred by the family head to another household. Thus, as some informants stated, "a woman had a theoretical possession of all the cattle she milked. If a man had more than one wife, his cows literally belonged to the children of the respective wives."<sup>53</sup> This was also true about land. Hence, T. Hakansson concludes, "although a woman has no property rights of her own, she is a trustee and manager of her house's property and exercises a great deal of

---

productive activities. Property allocated to a particular house is inherited by the sons of that house, hence the house-property system. For more details see pp. 117-120.

<sup>52</sup> Similarly, among the Luo, property was transmitted through women to their sons. Hay, "Economic Change" pp.99-100. This point was also emphasized by Christine Obbo when she stated, "in a polygynous household, a woman was the medium through which individual rights passed to her sons." C.Obbo, "Dominant Male Ideology and Female Options: Three East African Case Studies," in Africa, Vol.46, 1976, pp. 371-389.

<sup>53</sup> Luka Namulala and Timeteo Wepukhulu, Oral Interviews, (Bungoma).

independent decision-making in daily affairs."<sup>54</sup> In reference to the Luo Pala Okeyo pointed out that "women's security of tenure under customary law' was based upon "their structural role as lineage wives".<sup>55</sup> A breakaway clan adopted the mother's clan name to differentiate it from the main clan. For example, okwa Nabubwaya i.e. the son of Nabubwaya (Nabubwaya is the praise name of his mother's clan). Eventually, when the clan expands and breaks up, one clan would be known as Bakolati Babwaya i.e. Bakolati of the house of Nabubwaya clan."<sup>56</sup> Thus, women provided the basis for the future expansion of the lineage and clan.

The most significant point about the house-property complex was the fact that it constituted a kind of social recognition of women's participation in economic production. In reality the house-property complex was part of the male patriarchal management strategies formulated by male elders to camouflage and enhance male appropriation of female and child surplus labour value. Women's economic power was nil. Women

---

<sup>54</sup> Thomas Hakansasson, "Family Structure, Bridewealth and Environment in Eastern Africa: A Comparative Study of House-Property System," in Ethnology An International Journal of Cultural and Social Anthropology, Vol.28, 2, (1989), p.121.

<sup>55</sup> A.P.Okeyo, "Daughters of the Lakes and Rivers: Colonization and the Land Rights of Luo women," M. Etienne and E. Leacock, (eds.), Woman and Colonization, (New York: Praeger, 1980, p.194. Goody and Buckley added, "wives or mothers are but differentiating links. From the stand of the internal economy, however, women are more important than that." See Buckley and Goody, "Inheritance" p.117.

<sup>56</sup> Timeteo Wepukhulu, Oral Interview, Wamono, 3/2/1988.

could not inherit property but transmitted property to their sons.<sup>57</sup>

The traditional gender division of labour in society made adequate provisions for women to participate in their economy. Customary laws recognized and protected women's usufructural rights in land and cattle. However, the same laws made it impossible for women to own and inherit property. Whatever social prestige women gained from the system as long as they failed to control the means of production in partnership with males, their status would remain subordinate, dangerously exposed and subject to changing economic circumstances.

Changes in the Land Tenure System and its Impact on Women in Western Province, 1902-1963

The people of Kenya were dispossessed of much of their land by a series of measures between 1897 and 1926.<sup>58</sup> From 1897 Europeans could secure ninety nine year leases on crown lands,<sup>59</sup> which by 1901 appeared to be those not immediately

---

<sup>57</sup> Goody and Buckley, "Inheritance and Women's Labour in Africa," p.118.

<sup>58</sup> For more detailed accounts of land alienation in Kenya, see M.P.K. Sorrenson, Origins of European Settlement in Kenya, (Nairobi: O.U.P., 1968); R.D. Wolff, The Economics of Colonialism, Britain and Kenya, 1870-1930, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).

<sup>59</sup> KNA, East Africa Protectorate, Gazette, Vol.1,85, (No.26 of December 29, 1897) East Africa land Regulation No.1, see also Rita Mary Breen, "The Politics of Land: The Kenya Land Commission (1932-33) and its effect on land Policy in Kenya," Ph.D. Dissertation, Michigan 1976, p.20. Sorrenson,

cultivated by Africans.<sup>60</sup> In 1913 crown lands were expanded to mean even those cultivated by the people.<sup>61</sup> Belonging to the crown, Africans could not alienate the land they occupied, neither could they purchase.<sup>62</sup> These measures were designed to permit the government to sell land outright to white settlers.<sup>63</sup> An ordinance in 1915 also permitted 999 year leases.<sup>64</sup> In 1926 African usufruct use of land was confined to designated reserves,<sup>65</sup> and placed under the Natives Lands Trust Board.<sup>66</sup> Through these measures the agricultural development of "unused" lands in Kenya became exclusively a European prerogative. In the traditional system there were no "unused" lands because they were merely resting and

---

Origins of European Settlement, p.53.

<sup>60</sup> British and Foreign state papers, XCV, 999-1000, The East Africa (Lands) Order in Council, 1901.

<sup>61</sup> Sorrenson, Origins of European Settlement, p.223.

<sup>62</sup> Such reservation shall not confer on any tribe or member of any tribe any right to alienate the land so reserved or any part thereof. For more details, see KNA, Crown Lands Ordinance, 1915, Part VI: Reservation of Land of "Native" Tribes, Section 46-50.

<sup>63</sup> KNA, Ordinance No.21 of 1902, East Africa Protectorate, Gazette, The Crown Lands Ordinance, 1902, Sections No. 4-6.

<sup>64</sup> KNA, Crown Lands Ordinance, 1915 sections 34-38.

<sup>65</sup> Ainsworth was the sub-commissioner for Ukambani. See his 1895-1905 Report relating to the administration of East Africa Protectorate, Parliamentary Papers, Vol.LXXX, Cd 2740 Africa No.6 (1805), p.15.

<sup>66</sup> KNA, Agr/5/1/203, Development of Agriculture in Native areas, letter from Department of Attorney General's office, Nairobi to the Honourable member of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Nairobi 3/10/1946.

recuperating during the cycle of shifting cultivation. However by the mid- 1930's one fifth of all usable land and half that "worth cultivating" was under the control of the settlers.<sup>67</sup>

The colonial state encouraged the use of the customary land tenure system in areas demarcated as African reserves. This was stated in the Crown Lands Ordinance (Amendment) Ordinance of 1938 and the Kenya (Native Areas) Order-in-Council, 1938. Section sixty-eight of the Native Lands Trust Ordinance, 1938 stated:

In respect of the occupation, use, control, inheritance, succession and disposal of any land situated in the native lands, every tribe, group, family and individual shall have the rights which they enjoy or may enjoy by virtue of existing native law and custom.<sup>68</sup>

As we have seen, customary land tenure made adequate provisions for women's land use in rural economies. Thus, the Ordinance, sustained women's usufructuary rights in land.

In addition, article four (5) of the 1939 Kenya (Native Lands) Order in-Council strongly reaffirmed the use of customary land law in African reserves.<sup>69</sup> Explaining the customary system of land tenure in Kenya, the Attorney-General stated, "a very usual form of native title is that of a usufructuary right...enjoyed by native tribes, groups,

---

<sup>67</sup> Lord Hailey, An African Survey, (London: O.U.P., 1938), p.751.

<sup>68</sup> KNA, Agr/5/1/203, Department of Agriculture.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid..

families or individuals by virtue of existing native law and custom."<sup>70</sup> This bears testimony to the manner in which customary land tenure was misinterpreted by the colonial officials to suit their own ends. Women, it is true, enjoyed use rights, but men, in addition to usufructural rights, exercised rights of control and disposal. What is important to emphasize is the fact that the customary land tenure made adequate provisions for women to exercise and fulfil their role in dual fertility.

Up to 1940, women's usufructural rights in land was recognized by the colonial state. But, the situation was completely different in individual African households in Kenya. Individual control over land had increased, and women usually lost in the process. As Kitching explains:

...lineage and then clan households came to claim 'ownership' of land, and having claimed ownership, were able to sell and buy from others who also 'owned'. These processes had already commenced in Central province and in parts of North Nyanza when the land commission commenced its hearings. But the significance of the conceptual change which was the primary result of the Africans' drawing lessons and parallels from the material consequences of settler land 'ownership' seems completely to have escaped the commission's members.<sup>71</sup>

---

<sup>70</sup> KNA, Agr 5/1/203, Agriculture in Native Areas, letter from the Legal Department: Attorney General's office, Nairobi to the Honourable Member for Agriculture and Natural Resources, Nairobi 3/10/1946.

<sup>71</sup> G. Kitching, Class and Economic Change in Kenya: The Making of an African petite-Bourgeoisie 1905-1970, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), p.285. Land Commissions were set up at the end of the 1920s.



Women's land use rights were only recognized in theory and not in practice. In fact, the colonial land alienation policies which herded Africans into crowded reserves significantly altered the system of land allocation among African communities. Women were severely affected. Land was insufficient and patriarchal structures protected males rather than females as competition over land increased. Land acquired a new value. It was no longer as abundant as it used to be in the pre-colonial period. Explaining the situation in Western Province, Wagner argued that, "shortage of land is reflected in rapidly growing realisation of the exchange value of land. A field which in about 1925 'sold' for 10s. to 20s., in 1937 fetched between 100s. and 150s."<sup>72</sup> A further consequence of the growing shortage of land was the progressive subdivision and fragmentation of individual holdings.<sup>73</sup> The process of carving out individual plots had started. Thus within a decade of the reserves being demarcated, they had become inadequate which was hardly surprising given the needs of shifting cultivation and the manner in which colonial authorities had ignored them. This was demonstrated by the increased number of court cases in different regions involving land. As Kitching pointed out:

Thus, as land shortage increased, land disputes over boundaries became endemic ... they were resolved in practice in favour of the strongest or

---

<sup>72</sup> Wagner, II, op.cit., p.96.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p.97.

most influential groups, or those who enjoyed the patronage or support of chiefs, headmen and colonial officials.<sup>74</sup>

The difficulty which Africans experienced in establishing their claims was explained by the District Officer (D.O) of Kabuchai, (a division in Bungoma District) C.Campbell:

...no African land holder can hope for any security of tenure. Having successfully defeated A and B in a dispute over his shamba (land), he is still liable to be sued 'ad infinitum' by C, D and E, etc and each case must be heard as a separate issue. Very often, in the end he either reluctantly agrees or is forced to surrender an 'equitable' fragment of his holding to one or more of the plaintiffs.<sup>75</sup>

Land disputes affected men because the purchase and sale of land had become a male affair. Women had no disposal rights over land. However, while land insecurity and landlessness affected men, it even more severely affected women and children. Very few women could afford to purchase land anyway. However given the struggle in which males were engaged to acquire land it was hardly surprising that they enjoyed the support of female members of their families.

The purchase and sale of land facilitated the process of social differentiation in rural areas like Western province. As Kitching observed:

---

<sup>74</sup> Kitching, Class and Economic Change, p.285.

<sup>75</sup> KNA, Agr/KSM/1/509. Development and Policy: North Nyanza 1945-51, Appendix 'A' African Land Tenure by C, Campbell, District Officer, Kabuchai. Land usage, observed Campbell, had far out stripped customary land law. As a result, he argued, the title of the private holder was tacitly acknowledged in these days.

By the forties and fifties, when a stratum of land-accumulating households was firmly established in central province, Nyanza province and Machakos, the very inequality of land ownership, combined with population pressure and fixed Reserve boundaries, placed small landowning households in a vulnerable position.<sup>76</sup>

The socio-economic position of individual households was thus determined by the availability of non-farm income and the size of the land holding. Poor households, which sold land as a survival strategy, threatened the security of tenure for agricultural productivity in African areas. Changes in the system of land tenure affected women's ability to utilize land in the reserves. Women from poor households became landless peasants, forced to join the labouring poor.

Patriarchal systems of authority made it easier for men to take away the land use rights of women, either as sisters, daughters or wives. Male appropriation of female and child labour was based on the contradictory relations between men (as brothers and husbands) and women (as wives and sisters) to the productive resources. Thus, men are defined as non-producer-owners in patrilineal and patriarchal societies in contrast with women, who as wives in their husband's lineages were defined as producer-non-owners. This contradiction has since the 1920s sharpened with the effect that both the

---

<sup>76</sup> Kitching, Class and Economic Change, p.292. In addition Kitching observed that progressive farmers often took the lead themselves in entering 'exchange groups' to consolidate fragments even before the Administration's consolidation and registration teams had arrived in a district. p.326.

individualization of male authority over land and the commercialization of production which intensified female and child labour input in the colonial period worked without any proportionate control over the proceeds of their labour. As Zenebeworke Tadesse argues, "disappearance of communal land tenure dispossessed women of land and recognizing men as the new owners of land decreased women's control over productive resources."<sup>77</sup>

Changes in the land tenure system which resulted in the creation of land certificates worked to the advantage of men. Men were awarded land certificates. In fact, changes in the system of land allocation, individualization and privatization of parcels had taken place since the mid-1920s. As Okoth-Ogendo observed, "the establishment of fixed ethnic boundaries badly disturbed the equilibrium between patterns of land use and availability of land, a balance which had been maintained through the system of shifting cultivation or nomadic pastoralism."<sup>78</sup> Africans in the "reserve" began to want title deeds to protect their land from alienation. They had learnt the new game as far as land was concerned, and the concepts which underlay it.<sup>79</sup>

---

<sup>77</sup> Tadesse Zenebeworke, "An Overview," in Rural Development and Women in Africa, (Geneva: ILO, 1984), p. 14.

<sup>78</sup> H.W.O. Okoth-Ogendo, "African Land Tenure Reform," in J. Heyer (ed.) Agricultural Development in Kenya: An Economic Assessment, (Nairobi: O.U.P., 1976), p.157.

<sup>79</sup> Kitching, Class and Economic Change, p. 286.

Even as early as 1925, the colonial settler farmers supported and encouraged the state to grant title-deeds to individual Africans in Kenya. The colonial settlers hoped that the creation of title-deeds would encourage a land market among the indigenous people. Through the sale and purchase of land, a landless class would emerge which might work on settler farms. This would then provide a permanent solution to the settlers' problem of labour shortage. Hence, The Times reported:

Others see in the native reserve system the real obstacle, and would give the natives title and power to dispose of their land as individual possessors in the hope that a landless class would be provided who would have to depend on outside work for a living.<sup>80</sup>

The Swynnerton Plan qualified what was already happening in African reserves. It formalized the erosion of women's usufructural rights because in the reserves, land was owned by men. Small wonder then that land title deeds (certificates) were issued to men. This systematically strengthened patriarchal authority in Kenyan societies. Thus, as individual male control over land advanced, women were placed in a structurally more subordinate position.

The Swynnerton Plan drawn up by the Assistant Director of Agriculture in 1954 blamed the traditional land tenure system as the main obstacle to greater production and soil conservation. It was to be abandoned. Land was to be

---

<sup>80</sup> The Times, "East African Labour: The White Farmers Dilemma," London, 9/3/1925.

surveyed and fragmented holdings consolidated, a process already occurring in heavily populated reserves. Titles were to be granted to household heads. Swynnerton followed the governor's policy that, "firstly, we wish to achieve the farming of land in economic units on a permanent basis, and secondly, we want these units to conform to the configuration of the land in such a manner as to enable the application of the best methods of husbandry and improved techniques."<sup>81</sup>

Swynnerton blamed low agricultural productivity in African reserves on the existence of land fragmentation. However, the governor blamed it on the predominant place of women, and their lack of education.<sup>82</sup> Women were the backbone of agricultural production in Kenya. However, they did lack education in agricultural techniques. Women were the invisible farmers. Consequently, changes in agricultural innovations have always bypassed them. But, neither the governor nor Swynnerton made any efforts to enhance women's productivity in African areas. Instead, they hoped further to subordinate women's participation in agricultural production by changing the land tenure system. This was not achieved. Women have continued to dominate agricultural production in Kenya.

---

<sup>81</sup> KNA Agr/KSM/1/829 letter from Governor of Kenya to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 2/6/1950, para. 50.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., Governor of Kenya to Secretary of State for the colonies, 2/6/1950, p.5, para.5 (e).

Certificates of ownership were granted to male occupiers of land which would restrict fragmentation, provide collateral for agricultural credit and foster cash crop production. As the governor explained:

...it is suggested that individuals, if they are acceptable to the administrative authorities as good farmers of economic units of land, may apply for the issue of "a special title" in respect of their land. This "special title" will in fact confirm the customary rights of the holder...in addition, will contain provisions designed to prevent fragmentation... The benefits which this form of "special title" would confer on the holder would be protected against subsequent disputes and litigation as his customary rights and the title could be used as security for the granting of agricultural credit.<sup>83</sup>

The individualization and registration of land did not take into consideration women's usufruct rights in land. With the spread of commercialization of agriculture, Kitching argued, male rights of disposal of the usufruct of the whole land, (including its cultivated portion) was still successfully asserted.<sup>84</sup> In Western Province, land titles were specifically granted to men. This was as a result of the pre-colonial patrilineal and patriarchal traditions which vested the administration of land and other productive resources in male elders.<sup>85</sup> And as Wagner suggested, "the pressure of

---

<sup>83</sup> Governor to Secretary of State for the Colonies, op. cit., p.11, para.19.

<sup>84</sup> Kitching, Class and Economic Change, p. 289.

<sup>85</sup> Even in the pre-colonial period, the system of land holding was essentially individualist -- by this we mean that the bulk of important land use and disposal capabilities lay in the hands of individual male household heads, Ibid., p.291.

population, together with the increasing production of cash crops, has resulted in a growing need for land."<sup>86</sup> There are more mouths to be fed and, at the same time, people must produce more than formerly if they want to export. Indeed, as the United Nations Survey on the role of women in development pointed out:

For those households that own land or other capital the question of control over property becomes crucial. Women's property rights very often seem to get eroded just when property becomes essential for investing in agricultural development. Control of property and usufruct of land very often seems to disproportionately benefit men.<sup>87</sup>

The purpose of issuing individual land title deeds was to establish security of tenure and reduce fragmentation in land holdings. Assessing the problem of land fragmentation in Kabuchai division in Bungoma district, the D.O, C.Campbell observed that:

---

<sup>86</sup> Wagner, II, op.cit., p.95. In addition, Okoth-Ogendo observed that those directly affected were people such as women and children, both of whom had actual or potential rights of access to the use of land, but were without the power of ultimate control over it. See Okoth-Ogendo, "African Land Tenure Reform," p.177.

<sup>87</sup> United Nations, World Survey on the Role of Women in Development, Report of the Secretary General, 1984, p.20, para.38. In a process to preserve Mbari (clan) rights to registered land, men, argued Fiona Mackenzie, have reaffirmed the customary principle that wives can hold only temporary rights to use land belonging to their husband's mbari. For more details see, Fiona MacKenzie, "Land and Territory: The Interface Between Two Systems of Land Tenure, Murangla District, Kenya," in Africa Journal of the International Institute, 59, 1, 1989, pp.95-97.



Land is inherited by sons in equal proportions...As there is now no extra land available, uneconomic fragments result.<sup>88</sup>

Clearly the problem of land fragmentation in Western Province was more complex than what the Assistant Director of Agriculture imagined. Inheritance of land was the real problem.

In the vast majority of cases in Kenya, land reform meant individual male ownership of land. As a result, women's control over food production was undermined. In Western Province, especially in the densely populated areas like Maragoli and Bunyore (950 people per square mile) direct conflicts often arose between local requirements for food and cash. Frequently the answer was to forget about food and concentrate on a quick cash return.<sup>89</sup> In Bungoma district for example, commercialization of agriculture was achieved through the use of the plough. Additional land needed for the production of cash crops was acquired either from the family's uncultivated land, which in most cases was used as grazing fields, or from the fields previously used by the wife (wives) for the production of food crops.

Certainly the struggle for control and allocation of land within the household intensified with the diversification of cash crop production. As one informant stated, "land disputes

---

<sup>88</sup> KNA, Agr/KSM/509, Development policy: North Nyanza 1949-1951, African land tenure, para.7.

<sup>89</sup> KNA Agr/KSM/1/829, 2/6/1950.

and land related problems were more intensive during land preparation and planting seasons. This was the period when many women returned to their parents because the husband had taken away or not allocated adequate land for the production of food crops for her household."<sup>90</sup> And Kitching adds:

particularly in households with small total holdings, this struggle took the form of the attempt of the male household head to assert complete control over the use and disposal of the usufruct of the entire landholding, and to reduce the distinction between wives' gardens and husbands' (or household) gardens to a purely formal level.<sup>91</sup>

As one informant reported, "if you did not fight back, he took away all your plots. In polygynous households, less industrious women lost substantial quantities of their plots because those which were not utilized by individual wives were immediately acquired by the husband for the production of cash crops."<sup>92</sup> The decision to grow cash crops like coffee or expanded maize production rested entirely with men as heads of households. The resources allocated to women, even in rural female-headed households, were insufficient. As a result, women's participation in rural development was made difficult. Since women were responsible for food production, a change to cash crop production significantly diminished their ability to produce food crops. Hence, the production of cash crops

---

<sup>90</sup> Enock Mukhwana, Oral Interview, 18/2/1988.

<sup>91</sup> Kitching, Class and Economic Change, p.128.

<sup>92</sup> Marita Munoko, Oral Interview, Sirisia, 10/4/1988.

undermined women's use rights in land and by extension their responsibility in the production of food crops. Changes which took place as a result of the Swynnerton Plan had a significant impact on the situation of women vis a vis men. In the first place, women's economic rights were undermined through the process of land consolidation. Second, lack of collateral in the form of a land title made it impossible for women to get credit.<sup>93</sup> In fact, the control of land and all its products was and still is of critical importance to women. The position of women in Western Province can be summarised in the words of Barbara Rogers when she stated:

In terms of development projects and programs, control of land acquires importance not only in its own right, but as security for credit, and often as providing the criterion for people's access to inputs such as agricultural extension.<sup>94</sup>

---

<sup>93</sup> In evaluating the validity of land title as security for loans, Okoth-Ogendo argued that "title is considered merely as a necessary condition to a loan application, never as a sufficient one. In order to receive a loan, what appears to count is the social status of the applicant and his liquidity in the monetary system. In addition, Okoth-Ogendo suggested that both public and private financial institutions have increasingly become reluctant suppliers of agricultural credit to smallfarmers except under the most exhaustive scrutiny. The argument has been that small holders are bad risks and finance institutions must choose carefully to whom to lend in this sector. In the light of these problems, women's problems multiplied endlessly. For details, see Okoth-Ogendo, "African Land Tenure Reform," pp. 175-177.

<sup>94</sup> Rogers, Domestication, p.122. A similar observation was made by Tadesse Zenebeworke when she stated, credit and loans are less readily available to women, as they are made against land titles or made through co-operative societies of which women are mainly non-members. For details, see Zenebeworke, "An Overview," p.14.

Women without land titles had no access to loans for the development of their own enterprises.

There were, however, a few unique cases where women managed to get land title deeds. Conversely, changes in the land tenure system provided an indirect opportunity for women to purchase and own land in their own right and terms. This is an area for future investigation. Future research should focus on women who managed to purchase land especially with the rise of land buying companies in the newly established land settlement schemes. But during the colonial period in Kenya, due to financial constraints, a very limited number of women managed to purchase land.

The question of agricultural credit was not a new idea to the Abaluhya communities of Western Province. The Abaluhya enjoyed agricultural credit from the African betterment funds, which was the brain child of progressive peasant farmers in Western Province. As the governor confirmed:

In some comparatively fortunate areas, such as Kitosh (Bukusu) in North Nyanza, the inhabitants can grow relatively large surplus crops of maize. It is interesting to note that it was the Bukusu who originated the proposal, now adopted throughout the colony, that a portion of high price paid for maize should be withheld from the grower and paid into provincial betterment funds.<sup>95</sup>

However, the terms under which the agricultural credit was to be advanced to peasant farmers in Kenya proposed by Swynnerton were new. There were also more financial institutions whose

---

<sup>95</sup> KNA, Agr/KSM/829, letter from the governor of Kenya to the Secretary of State for the colonies, 2/6/1950.

doors were opened to African farmers. As the Swynnerton Report stated:

The farmer should, at this point become eligible to receive agricultural credit either from government, African district council or African betterment fund resources. Under certain circumstances, however, initial credit may be required to implement some of the sound farming desiderata.<sup>96</sup>

Only male progressive farmers enjoyed agricultural credit (loans) from the African betterment funds. Women were excluded. Agricultural bonus was paid to men who were recognized as farmers. This only formalized what was already happening in African rural areas. It provided the long overdue rubber stamp. Changes were not resisted. Changes had already taken place. Changes impoverished women and children.<sup>97</sup> Women, as a result became victims of patriarchal practices in the colony. Rural underdevelopment in Western Province was exacerbated by women's lack of access to loans and agricultural credit facilities. This limited their ability to purchase improved technology like tractors, ploughs, fertilizers and improved seeds. Men owned the land and title deeds were granted to them. However many men were

---

<sup>96</sup> R.J.M.Swynnerton, Report on Agrarian Policy, para.24 (d), p.10.

<sup>97</sup> For instance, Okoth-Ogendo observed that, except for parts of central province and matrilineal descent groups in the coastal province, women accounted for less than 5 per cent of total registered holders and children for even less. See also footnote No.60 where he makes reference to his own research in Kiambu, Kisii, Kisumu and Kwale districts. For further analysis see Okoth-Ogendo, "African Land Tenure Reform," p.177.

out in search of wage employment. Women and children remained on the land where they were required to labour on their husband's cash crop farms. This had a negative impact because women who had spearheaded development in rural areas, were disarmed by their lack of money and technology.

Women and children continued to provide labour needed for the production of cash crops like maize and coffee which were marketed through co-operative societies. They were, however, not enrolled as members in these societies. By 1952, there were 156 co-operative societies in Western Province, but none of them had women as members. In Bungoma District, for example, there was one coffee co-operative society (Chwele co-operative society), which was established in 1952. The society processed and marketed members' coffee. But there was not one female member. By 1956, the co-operative society had a total membership of 554, none of whom were women.<sup>98</sup> Up to 1963, Chwele co-operative coffee society was the largest and leading society in Western Province, but it had no female members. As one female informant stated, "we were not allowed to become members of the co-operative society because we (women) did not grow coffee. We did not have our own land on which to grow coffee."<sup>99</sup> Men appropriated all the cash earned through the sale of cash crops. The question of rural

---

<sup>98</sup> Peter Kisuya, Chairman, Chwele co-operative society, Oral Interview, Chwele (Bungoma), 20/8/1987.

<sup>99</sup> Selina Wanyonyi, Oral Interview, Lukhome, (Bungoma), 19/10/1987.

inequality between men and women has been underscored by Tadesse Zenebeworke. As she argued:

Men and women in rural households did not start out as equals, and patriarchal structures and authorities have given more resources to men, so the inequality increases.<sup>100</sup>

In Western Province, land registration was completed in 1976 in Kakamega district. The 1979-1983 Kakamega District Development Plan stated that, "there were 119,059 registered small holdings with a total hectarage of about 275,800 ha. The sizes range from 0.4 ha. to 3.0 ha."<sup>101</sup> The size of the plots generally increase from the south/northwards, and from the east/westwards, depending on the pressure on the land according to population density. Therefore the number of small plots is directly related to population densities. In Western Province, Hamisi and Vihiga have the highest population in Kakamega District, whereas Kimilili and Ndivisi were among the densely populated areas in Bungoma District. Table 1 provides the size and distribution of land in Bungoma District in 1969.

What table 1 shows is that about 31% of the farms were below three hectares and that participation in cash crop production would have to be at expense of food production.

---

<sup>100</sup> Zenebeworke, "An Overview," p.15.

<sup>101</sup> ROK, 1979-1983 Kakamega District Development Plan, (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1982), p.18. See also ROK, Statistical Abstract, 1976, p.2.

Table 1

Distribution of Farms by Size in Bungoma in 1969

Size Group (hectares)	No. of Parcels	% of Total	Total Hectares	% of Total
0.00-0.99	1,006	3.1	862	0.4
1.00-1.99	3,634	11.2	6,667	3.1
2.00-2.99	5,354	16.5	15,509	7.2
3.00-4.99	7,398	22.3	34,464	16.0
5.00-9.99	11,161	34.4	93,483	43.4
10.00 and over	3,893	12.0	64,405	29.9
Total	32,446	95.5	215,400	100.0

Source: ROK, Statistical Abstract, 1970.

Within this lowest segment women were likely to be forced to hire out as casual labour and became part of the rural poor. This lowest economic strata controlled about 10% of all the land. For the very few women who owned farms, given its high prices, here is where they were likely to be found. For the top strata of farmers, the figures were often almost reversed. Those controlling ten or more hectares formed 12% of farmers and controlled almost 30% of the land. Within this top segment, household heads could fully engage in a variety of cash crops and hire labour lifting the burden from the females in their families. The two middle groups possessed enough land to combine food and cash crops. Those on the edge of poverty with three to five hectares possibly could not afford ploughing. Forming 22% of the farmers they owned 16% of the land. The upper middle segment with five to ten hectares



formed 12% of the farmers and controlled 43% of the land. Clearly they could balance food and cash crops and hire ploughs. It was in the two middle segments of farming families where women's hours of agricultural labour would become longer and longer. Land was available. What it required was their labour.

In 1974-1975, the Integrated Rural Survey (I.R.S) observed that 200,262 people in Bungoma district were landless by 1975.<sup>102</sup> Similarly the department of Social Services handled 2619 cases of destitutes in the district in 1976. They also dealt with 339 cases of malnutrition at the Family Life Training Centre.<sup>103</sup> The majority of the landless people in any community in Western Province are women. Children form the majority of the victims of malnutrition which is also a physical sign of rural poverty, inequality and social differentiation.

### Conclusion

Inequality increased. In pre-colonial times women were far from the equals of men. The Abaluhya were patriarchal and patrilineal with all that implied in gender relations. While bridewealth cemented a social system, it also categorized

---

<sup>102</sup> ROK, Integrated Rural Survey, 1974-1975, Table 7:6.

<sup>103</sup> ROK, Bungoma District Development Plan 1979-1983, p.24.

women as property. However the system was mitigated in that land was plentiful and the role of women was honoured in that plentiful food meant women and children of quality. With the coming of colonialism gender inequality increased. Relations which had been primarily social became more and more predominantly economic. Rather rapidly land became scarce, women's access to it restricted and it took on a value which accrued mostly to males. Title deeds were issued to men, cash crops were favoured and men controlled them while food crops sank low in priority. Cash crops brought in three or four times the amount of money which food crops did. The colonial state sought as far as lay within its power to keep export crops high in price while pursuing a cheap food policy. Unquestionably African males were struggling to survive in the new colonial situation but they did so, partly at least by transferring their burdens to the women and children of their families. As credit loomed ever more important, ownership of land became crucial and women slowly lost their rights as Barbara Rogers argued:

The history of land policies, from those of colonial administration through those of development planners and land reform programs, is the history of women losing their rights and access to land and the concomitant benefits.<sup>104</sup>

---

<sup>104</sup> Barbara Rogers, "Women and Land Rights," ISIS, International Bulletin, No.11 (Spring 1979), pp.5-8. Indeed, women's need for land is beginning to receive international attention and support. For details see, World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development Report, (Rome: Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), 1979), p.10.

Inequality increased and women were forced into strategies designed merely for survival.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### Women and Children's Labour in the Rural Subsistence Economy: Western Province in the 20th Century.

The African can only consent to receive a small wage, because his wife and family in the Reserve grow the food, not only for themselves, but for him to eat when he returns from employment. That is, the industry which employs him is in reality subsidized by the labour of the wife and children in the Reserves. If the industry has to be subsidized in order to carry on, then, I submit, there is a case for a Government subsidy, to replace the hidden subsidy which in actual fact, the industry is now receiving from the women and children of the labourer. (Archdeacon William E.Owen)<sup>1</sup>

Women and to some extent, children, have always been the backbone of the rural subsistence economy in Kenya.<sup>2</sup> Since pre-colonial times, women have performed the majority of agricultural work in subsistence production. The importance of women as farmers prompted Ester Boserup to describe Africa

---

<sup>1</sup> The East African Standard, Letter to the Editor by W.E.Owen, Jan. 26 1942.

<sup>2</sup> The 1978 Economic Survey, for instance, aptly observed: "90 per cent of women live in rural areas where they make a major contribution to the economy. Almost all these women engage in farming activities on their own smallholdings, and produce much of the food which their families consume. They are also responsible for fetching water and firewood-often at some distance from their homes and for generally looking after their families. For details, see Republic of Kenya (ROK), Economic Survey, 1978, Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), Ministry of Finance and Planning, Government Printer, 1977, pp.184-186.

as a "region of female farming par excellence."<sup>3</sup> In many African communities, nearly all tasks connected with food production continue to be dominated by women.<sup>4</sup> During the colonial period, women's tasks expanded with male migration from the rural areas to settler farms and the emerging urban centres. Moreover, the introduction of petty commodity production in the rural areas further intensified the labour of women and children in the subsistence economy. In an economy which is basically agricultural, women and children have carried the main burden of rural farm labour activities both in the colonial and post-independence period. Their participation in the rural agricultural subsistence economy was therefore critical to the settler economy in Kenya which depended upon a supply of cheap African labour. Women and children underwrote the cost of that supply and thus played a critical role in sustaining the colonial settler economy. At

---

<sup>3</sup> Ester Boserup, Woman's Role in Economic Development, (London: Earthscan Publications, 1989), pp.16-22. Using selected surveys Boserup showed that women do more than half the agricultural work and in extreme cases as much as 70 and 80 percent.

<sup>4</sup> According to ECA, the case of the West Lake region in Tanzania is typical: men spend about 1,800 hours annually on agriculture while women spend about 2,600 hours. For more information, see the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, Human Resources Development Division, "Women: The Neglected Human Resources for African Development" in the Canadian Journal of African Studies, Vol.6, No.2, 1972, pp.359-370. See also John H. Cleave, African Farmers: Labour Use in the Development of Smallholder Agriculture, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974). Cleave cites several examples which suggest that, compared to men, African women often work longer both in farm and non-farm activities.

stake in this study is the work of women and children's labour in rural subsistence, as well as their work at often unpaid but socially essential domestic tasks. African women's and children's involvement in food cultivation facilitated a pattern of predominantly male migration, leaving women and children in the villages.

The household was thus not only a unit of production but also a unit of capitalist exploitation. However, the colonial state and settlers in Kenya used the presence of women and children in rural areas and their participation in the subsistence economy to justify paying low wages to male migrant labour. Certainly female and child labour participation in the household production system permitted capital accumulation by settlers. Women's involvement in household activities was central to their subordination to both African men and the colonial system. Domestic tasks were under-estimated and undervalued, despite their importance for capitalist accumulation and expansion in Kenya. Most studies of the peasantry in Africa have correctly stressed the importance of female labour in production. As discussed in the introduction, the importance of child labour is under heavy debate. However the debate only considers children's work in agriculture and herding, and rarely involves other duties which are not directly economically valued.<sup>5</sup> Moreover,

---

<sup>5</sup> E.Schildkrout, "Dependence and Autonomy: The Economic Activities of Secluded Hausa Women in Kano, Nigeria." in Women and Work in Africa [ed.] Edna G. Bay (Boulder: Westview press,

there has been a total neglect by scholars of the role children play in the family division of labour.

Other studies have also emphasized the importance of female labour in subsistence production and the total lack of appropriate technology to reduce the burden of women. Zenebeworke Tadesse for example writes:

Although the specificity of what is considered as "women's work" varies across countries and class, women seem to be charged invariably with the myriad of duties required for the daily maintenance and care of children and the family. In order to carry out these tasks they perform a large number of functions related to food processing, water carrying, handicrafts, marketing, and other types of household work ... in addition women participate in agricultural production, where they are often given the responsibility of cultivation, weeding, harvesting, processing of food and storage as well as helping out with animal husbandry. The absence of labour-saving devices renders women's production and reproductive activities drudgerous, physically demanding, and time-consuming.<sup>6</sup>

In spite of this sharp gender division of labour defining the tasks performed by women and distinguishing them from those done by men, women's work is central to production and

---

1982). See particularly "The Employment of Children in Kano" in Child Work, Poverty and Underdevelopment. [ed.] Gerry Rogers and Guy Standing, (Geneva: I.L.O Publication, 1981). For more information on Islamic women, see Margaret Strobel, Muslim Women in Mombasa Kenya, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).

<sup>6</sup> Zenebeworke Tadesse, "Women and Technology in Peripheral Countries: An Overview" in Pamela M.D'Onofrio-Flores and Sheila M.Pfafflin (eds.) Scientific-Technological Change and the Role of Women in Development, (Published for the United Nations Institute for Training and Research, Boulder: Westview Press, 1982), p.81.

integrated with that of men in terms of functions and space.

As Lourdes Beneria observed:

The primary contradictions that women face under these conditions is related to subsistence itself, drudgery of work, dominance of nature, and in a class society, the inequalities in the control of the means of production and the appropriation of output. The most basic problems faced by women in the rural areas of the Third World include the satisfaction of the most basic needs for themselves and their families. Malnutrition, high infant mortality rates, unsafe water, lack of the most basic health services, and abject poverty are among the problems in rural women's daily lives.<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore in an important contribution to conceptual clarity, Gita Sen argued, "subsistence production is not defined by the nature of the work involved but by the performer's relationship to the means of subsistence".<sup>8</sup> The greater the pressure on the means of subsistence of the rural poor, the more arduous and difficult their survival. In fact, one of the main difficulties confronting women in rural areas is the access and availability of the means of production to enable them to fulfill their subsistence requirements. The

---

<sup>7</sup> Lourdes Beneria, "Reproduction, Production and the Sexual Division of Labour" Cambridge Journal of Economics, Vol.3, No.3, 1979.

<sup>8</sup> Gita Sen, "The Sexual Division of Labour and the Working-Class Family: Towards a Conceptual Synthesis of Class Relations and the Subordination of Women," The Review of Radical Political Economics, Vol.12, No.2, 1980. Ann Stoler concurs with Gita Sen on this point because, she along with others argue that the relationship of both men and women to the production process is not indicated by gender alone but, more important, by access to strategic resources which crosscut sexual distinctions. For more information, see Ann Stoler, "Class Structure and Female Autonomy in Rural Java" in Signs, Vol.3, No.1, 1977, p.75.



crisis of subsistence production in Kenya and the role of female and child labour therein has therefore to be analysed both in terms of the quality and quantity of land set aside for food production. Regretably scholars who have examined the question of women's participation in subsistence production have increasingly ignored the fact that female and child labour has systematically been withdrawn from food crop production and redirected to the production of cash crops. This also explains the problems of persistent food shortages in previously self-sustaining economies. The expansion of cash crop production has been clearly achieved at the expense of food crop production. This chapter examines women and children's participation in rural food production processes. It will be argued that children's labour contributions are strategically important for women in their own use of time, because children assisted their mothers in agricultural and domestic chores.

#### Gender Division of Labour and the Use of Technology.

In Western Province it might be assumed that changes in the gender division of labour intensified the work of women in subsistence agricultural production processes. However it is difficult to prove such was so. What the evidence suggests is that the gender division of labour in traditional crops was rather rigid. Both oral informants discussing the past and

Wagner in the 1930's suggest the same. Informants insist that it remains so today. Where the division of labour changed seemed to occur when a new crop such as coffee or new technology such as the plough were introduced. However women's autonomy in subsistence production decreased, because their access to strategic resources, which included land and labour were regulated and controlled by male patriarchs. Women were forced to cultivate subsistence crops on less land, usually of poor quality and with traditional technology. Furthermore, women received no payment for their labour in subsistence production.

Furthermore, the cultivation of traditional subsistence crops proceeded under the traditional method because the colonial government in Kenya was not interested in subsistence production. In fact the land and labour used in subsistence production were seen by the colonial settlers in Kenya as a barrier to the expansion of commercial crops. Settlers wanted improved agricultural technology for their commercial export production, not for use in subsistence production. At the same time colonial officials were primarily concerned with crops which brought revenues and remained uninterested in non-taxable subsistence activities.

In order to understand the changes in the gender division of labour and technology in rural Kenya, one must consider traditional production patterns. Economically, the traditional extended family was essentially self-sufficient.

However, there was a clearly defined division of duties within the family. In Western Province, Gunter Wagner (writing in 1939), quoted a statement of a Logoli elder on the gender division of labour:

It is the wife's work to sweep, to grind, to cook, to build the fire, and to clean out the cattle partition. She carries the water from the spring, buys the cooking pots and gathers firewood, she brings the salt (i.e she burns the salt reeds in special pits and filters the ashes), cleans the walls of the surface of the house and the surface of the yard with cow-dung, beats the floor of the house (so that it becomes hard and level) and "knows" about the food on the food-shelf.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to the above list of household duties, Wagner notes, "the wife performs the greater and more strenuous part of garden labour, as hoeing is almost entirely women's work".<sup>10</sup> Similarly, children were trained at an early age to share in the duties of family life. Among the Abaluhya of Western Province, Wagner explained:

Soon after they have themselves learnt to walk properly, boys as well as girls are taught to carry about and generally 'nurse' their younger siblings, to run errands, and to make themselves useful in various little ways. At about the age of six boys begin to herd goats, then sheep, and later on cattle, a duty which they outgrow after they have been circumcised. Girls assist their mothers in the daily work of carrying water, gathering firewood, wild roots, and vegetables and, above all, in the weary task of grinding eleusine or sorghum for the morning and evening meal.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Gunter Wagner, The Bantu of Western Kenya, Vol.I (Published for International Africa Institute, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), p.41.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p.41.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p.42.

During the colonial period in Kenya, the withdrawal of male labour from the subsistence economy not only intensified demands upon female labour in agriculture, but also increased the demands upon child labour, especially female children. In fact, writing in 1931, the governor of Kenya categorically stated, "for the greater part of the year, the greater part of agricultural work of a village is performed by the women and the children."<sup>12</sup>

In Western Province, the principal traditional crops raised included eleusine (finger millet), sorghum, sesame, sweet potatoes, beans and bananas. Other crops of lesser importance were black peas, green peas, sugar cane, cassava which was introduced in Western Province by the Swahili traders from the Kenya Coast, but was adopted and cultivated by the local communities because it was a drought-resistant crop, as well as groundnuts (peanuts) and tobacco. Table one summarize the division of labour among men, women and children in the production of traditional subsistence crops in Western Province.

Several observations can be made from Table 1. Most notably, women and children's work in agriculture surpassed that of men. While men continued to carry out land preparation and cattle care, women, and to some extent girls,

---

<sup>12</sup> CO533/408/10, letter from the Governor, Kenya colony to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 23/7/1931, p.3

did a sizeable portion of the remaining work in planting, weeding and harvesting of food crops.

Table 1 confirms the fact that agricultural tasks dominated by men, such as bush clearing, usually required superior strength. But these tasks took a short period to complete. Farming tasks dominated by women and children were less strenuous, but more repetitive, hence, tended to be more time-consuming, such as hand-digging, weeding, harvesting and winnowing. But the distinctions between female and male tasks in agricultural production were not rigidly adhered to. Women participated in clearing and ploughing when there were not enough men or boys available and much more rarely men helped to weed unless the family could afford to engage help from outside. For most farming families in the district, weeding was the most time-consuming single-task. Indeed, as Lusabeti Naliaka explained, "work started before sunrise and continued until sunset. It was hard work especially weeding during the rain (sic) season. In fact weeding with a hoe was the hardest of all. Weeding was considered tedious work and took the longest time to complete."<sup>13</sup> The hardest and most laborious work involved caring for crops between planting and harvest time. Women and children were responsible for all the labour including protecting crops from wild and domestic animals,

---

<sup>13</sup> Lusabeti Naliaka Oral interview, Kimilili, 10/3/1988 and Matini Matumbufu Oral interview, Kibingei, 3/3/1988.

preventing weeds from smothering the growing seedlings and giving certain crops special care to ensure good yields.

Table 1

Division of Labour, 1902-1939.<sup>14</sup>

Crop	Men	Women and Children*	Men, women and Children
Eleusine	Clearing bush, scaring birds, construction of stores	Land preparation, planting, drying, actual storing and winnowing.	Weeding and harvesting
Sorghum	Clearing bush, scaring birds, construction of stores	Land preparation, planting, drying, storing, threshing and winnowing	Weeding and harvesting
Peanuts	Clearing bush, planting, weeding, harvesting	Land preparation, planting, weeding, harvesting, storing and shelling	-
Bananas	Digging holes, planting and de-sucking	Continuous weeding, mulching, manuring, de-sucking, harvesting and storing ( <u>bukekhe</u> )	Prunning, suckers planting

<sup>14</sup> Tables 1 and 2 were compiled from various oral interviews in Western Province, in 1987-1988. \*In table 1 women and children were included under one category because it was part of women's responsibility to socialize and train children. The training involved actual participation. The assumption was therefore that what women could do children would do as well.

Sesame	Clearing bush, planting and harvesting	Land preparation, planting, weeding, harvesting, storing and threshing	-
Potatoes	-	Land preparation, cutting vines, planting, weeding and harvesting	-
Vegetables	-	Land preparation, planting, weeding, plucking for use and sell.	-

In the practice of traditional agriculture, extra labour from kin and neighbours could normally be found -there was reciprocation of labour during harvests- but by the 1950s, changes had occurred and every job was mediated by money. Some traditional crops had acquired a market value, that is, they could be exchanged for money. For example, bananas were sold in the ripe or raw states. Potatoes, peanuts, sesame, green-grams and all types of vegetables had acquired a market value. Women were therefore involved in the production of the traditional crops and later on, when they acquired a market value, they also sold them.

The peak labour demands of the agricultural cycle occurred from March to May and from September to November.<sup>15</sup> These periods corresponded with the seasons of long and short

---

<sup>15</sup> Johnston Khisa, Oral interview, Kimilili, 20/4/1988. See also Wagner, The Bantu of North Kavirondo, Vol.II: Economic Life, (Published for the International African Institute, London: Oxford University Press, 1956), pp.21-22.

rains respectively. It was in these periods that distinctive work roles of men, women and children were evident as it is shown in Table 2. Several observations can be made from this table. The gender division of labour is clearly reflected in the agricultural labour pattern. Clearing bush and trees has always been the work of men. But, sowing and planting are, as a rule, done by women and children. Sometimes husbands help to dig the eleusine. It could also be argued that with

Table 2

Agricultural Cycle and Work Pattern in Western Province,  
1902-1930.

Month	Jan-Feb	March/April/ May	June/July/ August	Sept/Oct/ Nov/Dec.
Weather	Hot/Dry	Long rains	Short rains	Short rains
<u>Crop</u>				
Eleusine	Preparation of land and  planting	Weeding	Making of stores and harvesting sorghum and eleusine	-
Sorghum	Preparation of land, planting,	Weeding	Harvest retourne* crop	Preparation of land
Potatoes	-	Prepara- tion of land, tubers planting	Weeding	Tubers Planting
Bananas	-	Pruning mulching contin- ous weed ing remov	Continuous weeding	Suckers pruning and mulching



ing suckers  
and planting

---

Cassava	-	Continu ous weed ing, harv esting	Preparation Weeding, of land and pruning planting, harvesting
---------	---	--	--

---

\*Retourne is the new growth after the sorghum stalks have been cut. It is just like retourne in sugar cane.

increasing land shortage as the colonial period advanced, the land was left fallow for shorter periods and it became less strenuous to break it. Thus men benefitted. Since large trees did not grow, it was possible for women and children to prepare the land or at least assist men substantially. Women could more easily cross over and help men than men could reciprocate.

Table 2 also indicates that the heaviest agricultural work was done between March and August. These months of long rains were therefore the busiest season of the year. The table also indicates that there were two main seasons in Western Province. However, in the northern part of the province, the main crops were planted once, that is, in March. But in the southern part of the province, there were two planting seasons. Therefore the traditional year began with the hoeing or digging of the eleusine gardens during the latter half of January, and ended with the retourne sorghum harvest, which took place in the middle of December up to early January. Eleusine was planted once in a crop season but sorghum was planted twice because it was a drought resistant

crop. In most cases, the retourne crop dominated the second sorghum growing season. March to May were taken up with weeding. Harvesting of sorghum and eleusine took place in July and August. A close examination of the work pattern presented in Table 1 and the seasonal distribution of agricultural activities, shows that there was not a single month during which women did not perform any agricultural tasks. Indeed, as Wagner accurately observed, "weeding is done exclusively by women, wealthy husbands nowadays sometimes employing additional female labour to assist their wives and daughters in this unpopular task".<sup>16</sup> However, rich peasant farmers were rare in the rural areas. They were not significant until the introduction of cash crops.

While there were no hard and fast rules governing the labour contributions of women, children and men with regard to the production of particular crops, it seems that the contributions of men varied with the proportion of the crop destined for sale or its importance in customary celebrations and festivities. Eleusine and sorghum served as the staple food for the Abaluhya communities before maize was popularized in the 1920s. In addition, sorghum and eleusine also served as the main ingredients in brewing traditional alcoholic beverage. Eleusine was mainly used as a yeast. It was this latter function which motivated men to participate in the production of these crops.

---

<sup>16</sup> Wagner, The Bantu of North Kavirondo, Vol.II, p. 26.

Women and the Use of Technology in Subsistence Economy.

In subsistence production, the traditional farm implements remained in use throughout the period under study. Technological improvements did not alleviate the burden of women's agricultural activities. The slow process of introducing ploughs meant that production had to rely on the hoe, and the heaviest burden of hoe agricultural production fell on women and children. The traditional farm implements which included hoes and hatchets, pangas [single edged blades], and weeding sticks, remained in use throughout the colonial period. Describing the traditional implements used in Western Province agriculture, Wagner writes:

For breaking the ground, a long digging stick [L. omulo] is used, which is cut from branches of the [ekegomoli] tree, noted for its hard wood. The [omulo] is sharpened at the end like a blade, but no stone is attached to it as a weight. ... The breaking up of a piece of fallow into [amakindi] is done with the ordinary hoe [L. embago], a task that is performed by either men or women. There are two types of traditional native hoe. One of them [embago] has an iron blade attached to a knee/shaped wooden handle [omuhini]. The other one [elihaya] has a wooden blade [ekikula] fastened to the same kind of handle, and is used chiefly in the stony soil prevailing in some parts of South Maragoli. Nowadays native hoes have largely been superseded by those of European manufacture, which are called [amagembe]. ... The harvesting implement is crooked, single-edged knife, called [ombano].<sup>17</sup>

The pre-colonial methods of production, which involved shifting cultivation and inter-cropping, were an attempt by

---

<sup>17</sup> Wagner, The Bantu of Western Kenya, Vol.2, p.34.

Africans to minimize land usage given the low level of technology available.

Although some achievements were made in agricultural research in the 1920s, and 1930s, qualitative changes in methods of production in African areas were limited. For example, before 1923, the colonial government's efforts to impart agricultural information in Western Province was occasional, unco-ordinated and limited to seed distribution. In 1923, the government agricultural staff were posted to African areas. During the same year, the Bukura Farmers Training Centre opened, primarily to train male African agricultural instructors. The dominant patriarchal norms, both European and African, equated men with farming and did not find it necessary to train women. Officially, the colonial government was committed to the improvement of food crops and instruction in better cultivation practices in the African areas. However, the scale of such operations was so small that only nine Europeans and sixty six Africans were assigned to all African areas in the 1920s.<sup>18</sup> In 1930, the first District Agricultural Officer was posted to North Kavirondo. As a result, the agricultural staff increased from twelve in 1933 to sixty eight in 1937.<sup>19</sup> As Kathleen Staudt

---

<sup>18</sup> J. Heyer, "A survey of Agricultural Development in the Small Scale Farm Areas Of Kenya Since 1920s," Institute of Development Studies, University of Nairobi, Working Paper No.194, 1974, pp.4-5.

<sup>19</sup> Wagner, The Bantu of North Kavirondo, Vol.II, p.30.

has correctly emphasized, male agricultural extension officers dealt with men, who were officially recognised as the producers and owners of cash crops in African areas.<sup>20</sup> In fact Europeans knew little about African food crops and their efforts even after they began were directed towards other crops. Women, who were the real burden-bearers of rural agricultural activities, were neglected. Consequently, the lack of agricultural extension services for women, even in areas where they assumed full responsibility for agriculture, has been noted in many cases.<sup>21</sup> This hampered the productivity of African subsistence agriculture. In fact, such attitudes have persisted since independence.

To encourage deeper digging, the Department of Agriculture, "propagated the introduction of hoes of European manufacture. In addition to having a longer blade than the old style hoe, the European hoe is attached to the handle at a right angle, whereas the traditional hoe is tied to an acute-angled, bifurcated branch. Owing to this difference of construction, the employment of the modern hoe enables the

---

<sup>20</sup> K.Staudt and Audrey C. Smock have emphasized the fact that, "Kenya is an almost classic case of the tendency noted by E.Boserup and others of men benefitting disproportionately from new economic opportunities and innovations introduced during the colonial period." For details, see Tony Killick, Papers on the Kenyan Economy: Performance, Problems and Policies, (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1981) and K.Staudt, Agricultural Policy Implementation: A Case Study From Western Kenya, (West Hartford: Kumarian Press, 1985).

<sup>21</sup> Susan Abbott, "Women's Importance for Kenyan Rural Development," in Community Development Journal, Vol.10, No.3, 1975.

tiller [women] to dig considerably deeper than is possible with the old hoe."<sup>22</sup> The introduction of the European-style hoe in the 1920s contributed substantially to the intensification of female and child labour in agriculture. The hoe was not a labour-saving device for women. However as some informants observed, "European hoes were readily available in the shops. Many people were able to purchase them. The use of European hoes improved and facilitated agricultural production."<sup>23</sup> Similarly, Lukela Lubasi reported that, "the use of European hoes improved performance in agricultural work. You worked well and faster than when we used traditional hoes."<sup>24</sup> In addition, Susan Wachosi observed that, "the major problem with traditional hoes was their unavailability. People made several trips to the black smith's home without any success. Good traditional hoes were usually imported into Kimilili, Kabras, Webuye and generally Western Province from Samia in the present Busia District on the Kenya/Uganda border."<sup>25</sup> There are no statistics available in terms of the distribution of hoes in Western

---

<sup>22</sup> Wagner, The Bantu of Western Kenya, Vol.2, p.34.

<sup>23</sup> Salome Mumali, Oral interview Kabras, 11/3/1988. Shadrack Waswa, concurred with Salome Mumali's on the usefulness of European hoes, Oral interview, Hoey's Bridge, 4/2/1988.

<sup>24</sup> Lukela Lubasi, Oral interview, Kabras, 11/3/1988.

<sup>25</sup> Susan Wachosi, Oral interview, Kamukuywa, 4/9/1987. She also added that, "traditional hoes imported from Samia were popular and were generally referred to as "chimbako chisamia" (the hoes from Samia) throughout Western Province."

Province but it is almost certain that by the 1930s every home had at least one hoe [individuals in different homesteads had purchased their own hoes from Asian traders]. This agrees with Wagner's suggestion, "the introduction of modern hoes has been a complete success."<sup>26</sup> In tilling land, the deeper one goes, the more energy is expended. Therefore, the introduction and use of the modern hoe did not reduce the burden of women in agricultural production. The European hoe must have had some advantages or it would not have become so popular so quickly. Presumably it was more efficient in turning over the soil. Usually it was cheaper. Frequently it was more available. The introduction of ploughs in the mid-1920s worsened the situation of women and children's participation in the rural agricultural economy. Ploughs were used by men. According to the reports of the agricultural officer, between 1929 and 1936, Kimilili division alone had forty-five ploughing companies with an average of four ploughs each.<sup>27</sup> They could be rented out and therefore served far more farmers than their numbers indicated. In North Kavirondo 275 ploughs in 1930 had increased to over 2,000 in 1938.<sup>28</sup> The plough was promoted as a labour-saving device. It only conserved male labour. In fact one set of statistics showed

---

<sup>26</sup> Wagner, The Bantu of North Kavirondo, Vol.II, p.34.

<sup>27</sup> KNA, Ministry of Agriculture, Agr/4/124, 1936.

<sup>28</sup> KNA, Ministry of Agriculture, Agr/5/50/2, see also North Kavirondo Annual Reports, 1931-1941. The section especially on Economic Survey is crucial.

that before the plough women and children spent no hours in breaking the land, but after the plough they were engaged in the activity for the same number of hours as males (compare Tables 4 and 5 pp.183-184). There are no comparative figures to show the increase in acreage which resulted from the introduction of the plough but tilling by hand took ten to fourteen days while the plough took one. One can be sure that acreage under cultivation, which required greater exploitation of female and child labour increased. In North Kitosh (Bukusu) the plough encouraged farms of twenty to thirty acres where previously under five acres was cultivated.<sup>29</sup> This dramatic increase in the acreage under cultivation required more planting, hoeing, weeding and threshing. The majority of these tasks required female and child labour.<sup>30</sup> Similarly in Zimbabwe, Elizabeth Schmidt discovered that "the plough allowed the amount of acreage under cultivation to be

---

<sup>29</sup> KNA, North Kavirondo Annual Report, 1936, See section on Economic Survey, pp.23-24. See also Wagner's comment on the use of ploughs in Western Province. Wagner pointed out, "where ploughs have been intelligently used, as in North Kitosh [Bukusu], they have made possible the development of farming units of upto 20 or 30 acres, and have thus contributed essentially to the increase in production. Wagner, The Bantu of North Kavirondo, vol.2, p.35. E. Schmidt, "Farmers, Hunters, and Gold-Washers: A Reevaluation of Women's Roles in Pre-Colonial and Colonial Zimbabwe" African Economic History, No. 17 (1988) p.65, footnote No.83.

<sup>30</sup> Boserup argued, "...change from shifting cultivation to plough cultivation, men's burden of work usually increases while that of women diminishes." The situation in Kenya was contrary to what Boserup observed about the Asian communities. In Western Province, the adoption of the plough increased women's labour as it reduced men's labour. For details, see Boserup, The Role of Women in Economic Development, p. 34.



dramatically extended, and that increased acreage required more planting, hoeing, weeding, harvesting, threshing and grinding- tasks that were, for the most part the responsibility of women and children."<sup>31</sup> Clearly, the use of the plough intensified female and child labour.

Ploughs, which had spread dramatically, decreased the labour of men. Technology which decreased women's labour was less popular. Mills reduced the work of women, and yet table 3 shows how few families had adopted this technology by 1938. At the same time, it is necessary to note that water-mills were constrained by water sources, and that these mills were slow, that is their output per hour was low. Little effort

Table 3

Number of Machines Owned by Kenyans in Western Province.

Type of Machine.	No. in N Kavirondo.
Ploughs	2,109
Water mills	314
Overshot water mills	3
Power driven hammer mills	3
Ox-carts	17
Maize planters	4
Ox-cultivators	43
Sewing machines	213
Motor cars	4
Lorries	2

---

Source: KNA, NKDAR, 1938, see economic survey, p. 25.

was made to improve them. With only 320 maize mills in Western Province, their geographical distribution was disappointingly sparse, causing women and children to walk for

---

<sup>31</sup> Schmidt, "Hunters, Farmers, and Gold-Washers," p. 66.

long distances to have their maize ground.<sup>32</sup> However, mills helped to reduce women's labour in processing foodstuffs.

With the expansion of maize production in North Kavirondo and especially in the northern region, there was also an increase in the purchase of hand posho mills of the 'Atas' and 'colonist' types.<sup>33</sup> By 1927, North 'Kavirondo' had the highest number of flour mills in Nyanza Province. According to Kitching's analysis, "North Kavirondo had 102 maize flour mills, Central Kavirondo 34 and South Kavirondo 9."<sup>34</sup> In 1937, it was recorded that "some 95 maize flour mills were sold in Kimilili and 8 were sold in Kakamega."<sup>35</sup> Although maize flour mills were not sufficient nevertheless they reduced the burden of women in food processing. Women and children walked for long distances carrying maize on their heads to get to the flour mills. They were also required to pay for the services of the mill. Consequently, mills operated on the barter system which dominated business

---

<sup>32</sup> Hay, "Economic Change in Luoland" p.143, also observed that in Kowe, "women found it more difficult to grind maize than sorghum, and the widespread use of maize as flour in daily diets depended upon another technological innovation - that of the hand gristing mill -in the late 1920s."

<sup>33</sup> Hand posho mills were operated manually. This means that female and children's labour was still needed to operate these mills. The work was exhaustive. Atas and colonist were brand names.

<sup>34</sup> Kitching, Class and Economic Change in Kenya, see table vi:2, pp.160-161.

<sup>35</sup> KNA, North Kavirondo Annual Reports (NKAR), 1936, Economic Survey, p.23 and NKAR, 1939, p.24.

transactions in African areas.<sup>36</sup> In the case of maize milling, maize was exchanged for a service or a labour process. A miller kept a proportion of the maize brought as a charge for service.<sup>37</sup> The following were the rates for grinding maize, eleusine or sorghum.

Table 4

Rates for Grinding Maize, Eleusine or Sorghum.

<u>Quantity</u>	<u>Equivalent</u>
1 tin of maize	24-36 maize cobs. [25-30 lbs.]
1 tin of eleusine	30-48 maize cobs.
1 tin of sorghum	30-48 maize cobs.
1 tin of <u>kamamela*</u>	30-48 maize cobs.

Source: Furida Wanyonyi, Ben Wanambisi and Melabu Bukokhe oral interviews, 10/3/1988, 15/3/1988, 19/3/1988. The rates for grinding maize or sorghum were almost uniform. \*Kamamela [yeast] This was germinated eleusine used for the brewing of local liquor [busaa or kwete.]

Similarly, maize planters and ox-cultivators were also supposed to reduce the labour of women and children as planting and weeding were their responsibility. But the total number purchased was miniscule. Only four maize planters and

---

<sup>36</sup> Temeteo Wepukhulu, oral interview, Wamono, 3/2/1988. The barter system of trade continued to operate in African areas as money was extremely difficult to come by and especially for women who did not have a constant and reliable source of income.

<sup>37</sup> Kitching, Class and Economic Change in Kenya, P. 165.

forty three ox-cultivators could not cope with the expanded acreage cleared by 2,109 ploughs. Moreover, only a few people could afford to purchase them.

Food preparation and processing was women's responsibility, and took lots of time. Lack of simple technological innovations in food processing further contributed to women's increased labour demands. As Irene Tinker has succinctly summarized:

Thus, technology has been used in a way that has had detrimental and paradoxical consequences for African rural women. While, on the one hand, the technological changes in the modern agricultural sector have deprived women of employment, the shortage of simple technological improvement in food processing, energy and water supply, on the other hand, have left women overburdened in their daily lives.<sup>38</sup>

Thus, for the most part technological innovations worked to the detriment of women and did not reduce the burden of women in agricultural production and food processing activities. While ploughs were promoted as a labour saving device for men, they significantly increased women and children's work load. More specifically, women continued to be responsible for most of day-to-day work, and contributed the bulk of the labour over the course of the agricultural cycle. Therefore, the rapid adoption of the plough actually increased exploitation of female and child labour and reduced that of men.

---

<sup>38</sup> Irene Tinker, [n.d], "New Technology for Food Chain Activities: The Imperatives for Equality for Women, "Washington, D.C: WID Resource Centre, USAID.

Gender Division of Labour and Time-Allocation in  
Agricultural Production Activities.

Male patriarchs were not only victims of the exploitative colonial capitalist system, but were themselves also involved in the extraction of surplus value of labour from subordinate household members, that is women and children. The household as a unit of economic production was transformed into a unit of surplus labour exploitation. The theme of wife as a form of property for the husband, purchased with cattle was used by colonial officials and settlers in Kenya to justify male exploitation of female and child labour. Writing in 1930, one official, C.C.Parkinson, shamelessly claimed, "buying wives for heads of cattle set in motion a process by which these women and their offspring became the principal agricultural labourers and their husbands the principal beneficiaries."<sup>39</sup> The idea that African men had purchased wives provided the excuse for the colonial officials to encourage the exploitation of women by African men.

This justification ignored the purpose of the traditional bridewealth system. Bridewealth provided a bond of unity between two previously unrelated clans. It was the basis of clan solidarity and therefore was not considered as a form of payment. However while this was its social utility,

---

<sup>39</sup> CO 533/396/5, comments by Mr.Parkinson on Dr.Shiel's memorandum on alleged injustices to native peoples in Kenya, 5/3/1930.

bridewealth was founded in an economic relationship of exploitation. While society tended to stress its social usefulness, Europeans immediately capitalized upon its economic underpinning. With the introduction of colonial capitalism in Africa in general and Kenya in particular, changes took place which affected the position of women in society. Bridewealth was used by the colonial officials to justify the exploitation of female and child labour by African men and possibly African males may have begun to look upon it the same way.

Colonial officials claimed that women were the property of men like any other property. As African males were swept into a system where almost everything was valued in money terms, bridewealth took on a context which Europeans spelled out in very brutal terms. In fact, commenting on the position of women, one colonial official stated:

To the native mind, wives are still property and valuable property at that. One can picture the position best by a sort of native arithmetical table:

x goats = 1 sheep  
 x sheep = 1 cow  
 x cows = 1 woman

Consequently, a woman acquires a husband and the man acquires valuable property, seeing that his wife tills ground or looks after cattle on his behalf.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup> CO 533/396/5. The commoditization of women and the monetization of dowry system in Africa was as a result of these arguments.

Indeed, to justify the forceable demand for male labour, all kinds of excuses were used. For example, a settler claimed:

...He [the African] has no other wants to supply save one. He saves his money to buy goats. With the goats he buys cows. With cows he buys a wife. When he has a wife he makes her work. He plants maize and beans to sell. He gets about 2s. for a kerosine tin full of maize, and about twice that amount for beans. The saving process goes on till he gets more goats, more cows, another wife.<sup>41</sup>

Similarly, in 1920, The Times, editorialized:

The male native lives in most cases, in a state of idleness, and forces by means of his strong arm and tradition his womenfolk to labour for him. He buys them and they are, in fact, his slaves. They do all the heavy work of the field and household besides rearing a family for him.<sup>42</sup>

These are some of the stereotypes used by the colonial administrative officials and white settlers in Kenya to justify women and children's increased work-load in agriculture. Women and children were classified as labourers on their husband's and father's cash crop farms which, of course they were. The problem with colonialism was twofold. Where African customs suited settler needs, they were defended as sacrosanct regardless of how degrading or exploitative they might have been. Where African customs did not suit settler needs, they were disregarded and even forcibly suppressed.

Children, as well as women, had to work harder. During the colonial period in Kenya, female children contributed more

---

<sup>41</sup> Letter to the editor, The Times, 15/3/1921.

<sup>42</sup> The Times, 24/12/1920.

labour in agricultural production than male children. This reflected the patriarchal norms of African society. The differences in the socialization processes between female and male children were significant. The operative principle was that female children would eventually get married. As future mothers, they needed the necessary work experience.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, in rural areas, female children worked both in the fields and in the house. Male children had less responsibility. Young males did almost as much as girls but at about fourteen to sixteen years of age, teenage boys did less work than any other category within the family. This slackness continued right up to when they became mature. On the other hand girls was more as one might expect. They worked hard all throughout their life, and their work intensified as they matured. From children their labour hours increased until they reached the maximum at maturity. Boys experienced the big drop from fifteen to the late twenties when they were at the peak of their physical powers. Thus boys were raised and trained to expect greater leisure than girls. Young girls were being raised to work 2,000 hours per year in addition to domestic labour while teenage men were being socialized into 1,000 hours per year with no domestic labour. This was made very clear. Before circumcision the boy was a child and worked; after initiation into manhood he was being trained how to spend his leisure.

---

<sup>43</sup> Luke Namulala, Oral interview, Musese, 10/11/1987.



In a letter to the East African Standard, a settler reported:

I have seen 10 to 12 native women and girls, and 3 or 4 decrepid old women cultivating a cotton shamba, the women with babies all practically naked, supervised by a native in brown shoes and tweed suit: supervision which consisted of sitting under a bush and shouting instructions.<sup>44</sup>

The women and girls in question were working on a chief's farm, hence the supervision. As some informants stated, chiefs in rural areas exploited women and children's labour. For example, Chief Mulama in Kakamega had the largest farm because he enjoyed the free labour of women, children and sometimes men.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, Chief Sudi Namachanja was a very rich man because he managed to use his position to get free labour. "Imagine," Wanyonyi Kasuti reported, "Sudi had 100 wives and several hundreds of children. He owned a lot of land and there was plenty of food in his home. All colonial chiefs in this area (Western Province) used female and children's labour."<sup>46</sup> Wanyonyi added, "look at Chief Namutalla of Kimilili, he was installed as chief in 1934 and that transformed him. He married many wives, had got a lot of land, cattle and used the unpaid labour of women and

---

<sup>44</sup> IMC, Box 240, East African Standard, letter to the editor by Brian O'Kelly, 7/2/1925: "East Africa Native Labour."

<sup>45</sup> Simon Situma, Oral interview, Lubalo, Kakamega, 4/10/1987.

<sup>46</sup> Wanyonyi Kasuti, Oral interview, 7/12/1987.

children."<sup>47</sup> They were also supervised by harsh men appointed by the chief. Certainly, such demands further intensified the burden of women and children in agricultural production activities. It also diverted their attention from their own farms and as a result, contributed to their increased work-load.

In most cases, male children migrated to work on settler plantation farms. This aspect of child labour migration in Kenya has not been explored in detail but available evidence suggests that there were more male child labour migrants than female. For instance, a statement in the 1925 Native Affairs Department observed, "there was an increasing number of Kavirondo juveniles employed on sisal estates in the Thika, Donyo Sabouk and Fort Hall [Murang'a] Districts."<sup>48</sup> A letter from the Provincial Commissioner's Office to all Nyanza District Commissioners noted that children from Nyanza Province composed the majority of pyrethrum pickers in the Rift Valley Province, particularly in Molo and Mau areas. However, "only male children between 12 and 14 years of age were involved."<sup>49</sup> Consequently, female children made more

---

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> KNA, PC/NZA/3/20/17/1 letter from Native Affairs Department to Chief Native Commissioner, stating that the employment of boys under age on plantations and apprentices and other related activities was the central theme.

<sup>49</sup> KNA, DC/KSM/17/27, letter from Provincial Commissioner's Office, Nyanza Province to District Commissioners, Nyanza, 12.7.1934

substantial contributions in rural non-settler agricultural production than male children.

In addition, the pressure on women and children to contribute to rural agricultural production increased as a result of massive adult and child male labour migration. As Sharon Stichter has emphasised, " the absence of any substantial change in African agricultural technology or organisation in this period, coupled with the high level of male absenteeism points to the conclusion that the bulk of the increased agricultural labour fell on the women."<sup>50</sup> This point was stressed by missionaries in Kenya on many occasions. For instance, in 1921, H. D. Hooper pointed out, "the biggest sources of labour are the Kavirondo and the Kikuyu tribes, the former totalling 897,941, the latter 732,624 in population."<sup>51</sup> In a critique of the male migrant labour

---

<sup>50</sup> Sharon Stichter, "Women and the Labour Force in Kenya 1895-1964," Rural Africana, Winter, No.29, 1975-1976, p.48. On the point of male labour migration from Western Province, Wagner in 1932, noted, "about 20% and in 1937, about 30% of adult male of the district [and probably an even higher percentage among the Logoli ] was at any given time of the year away from the Reserve. A large number serve a six months' contract as farm labourers in the European Highlands, while the remainder are employed on a long-term basis as domestic servants and in various skilled and semi-skilled occupations. For details see Wagner, The Bantu of Western Kenya, p.94, Sharon Stichter, Migrant Labour in Kenya. Capitalism and African Response, 1895-1975, (London: Longmann, 1982).

<sup>51</sup> International Missionary Council [hereafter IMC ] Box 237 letter from H.D.Hooper to J.A.Oldham, 18th October, 1924.

system in Kenya, W. E. Owen, then the archbishop of Kavirondo argued:

The most potent factor, since our rule in Kenya, which has increased the burden imposed upon the women has been the demand for the labour of the men on the part of non-African employers. These men leave home to seek for the tax money in large numbers, and of course this throws a very heavy burden on the women who remain behind to keep the home going.<sup>52</sup>

Further, in a discussion of the development of the labour control system in Kenya, Lonsdale and Berman observed, "the principal labour producing districts in Kenya became simultaneously the major areas of peasant commodity production, with the provincial administration having to maintain a tenuous balance in the contradictory articulation of the peasant and settler spheres."<sup>53</sup> However, Lonsdale and Berman failed to see that in the absence of male labour, female and child labour was crucial to resolving this contradiction in the production of both subsistence and cash crops.

In 1939, a statement in the Labour Report and Returns indicated:

The Nyanza Province continued to be the chief source of the labour supply. The average monthly number from the province at work over a period of 6 months during the year was over 80,000 and on December 31st 1939, there were 86,304 registered

---

<sup>52</sup> CO 533/408/10, Letter to the editor, Manchester Guardian, 7 March 1931, by W.E.Owen.

<sup>53</sup> John Lonsdale and Bruce Berman, "The development of the labour control system in Kenya, 1919-1929," Canadian Journal of African Studies, Vol.14, No.1, 1981, p.77.

natives in employment from the province. The number of unregistered natives in employment is not known but the total of natives employed from the province must be approximately 100,000.<sup>54</sup>

The proportion of unregistered 'natives' in employment was really very large. This is one example to illustrate the unreliability of the colonial labour statistics. Most unregistered labour worked as casual labourers, and therefore their records and numbers were not declared. This was the cheapest form of labour and was therefore the favourite of European employers. Others went to Uganda where the conditions of employment were better than in Kenya. This labour migration did not reduce African rural production. In Kenya, according to Lonsdale and Berman, "unlike, or so it appears, other colonies in settler Africa, there were no real labour reserves in Kenya, the main sources of labour supply were also the centres of African production."<sup>55</sup> It was female and child labour which was crucial in this increased production. In 1926, The Times, made a special review on agricultural development in 'native reserves' in Kenya. It discovered:

At the same time, the remainder, with the old men, and the women and children are becoming industrious within the reserves and each year sees an advance in the value of agricultural exports from native

---

<sup>54</sup> KNA, Lab 5/20, Labour Reports and Returns, Annual Report, 1939.

<sup>55</sup> John Lonsdale and Bruce Berman, "Coping with Contradictions: The Development of the Colonial State in Kenya, 1895-1914." in Journal of African History, Vol. 20, 1979, p.494.

sources. From 260,000 pounds, in 1922-23, the value of such produce has risen to 546,000 pounds in 1924-25.<sup>56</sup>

The task of agricultural production in the rural areas of Kenya fell squarely in the hands of women and children. Lonsdale and Berman under-estimated the labour contributions of women and children by arguing that male labour moved in and out of the rural areas but the peak labour season for the estates and the smallholders was the same. However, male labour migration persisted and increased throughout the colonial period, yet rural production increased as well. As Smock argues, adult females contributed the major agricultural labour input for smallholding farming. Women worked with all crops and supplied the labour for all stages of the agricultural cycle.<sup>57</sup> Female and children's labour was thus the backbone of increased production in the rural areas. Given the limited contribution of young males, their absence from the rural area probably had little effect upon production. This was why production increased despite the withdrawal of up to 100,000 males from the work force many of whom would be in the leisure ages from fourteen to thirty. These males had been under-employed in the traditional productive system. Since even working mature males contributed only 30% of the labour in agricultural production,

---

<sup>56</sup> The Times, 23/2/1926.

<sup>57</sup> Audrey Chapman Smock, "Women's Economic Roles," in Papers on the Kenyan Economy Tony Killick (ed.), p.222.

even their absence was less likely to cause a decline. The great decline in agricultural production would not strike Kenya until the urban drift when women began to leave the land and that was to be some time in the future.

Under the traditional gender division of labour, women were totally in charge of the production of subsistence food stuffs. The availability of labour determined the quantity of land to be planted with different food crops. In addition, women exchanged small quantities of their food crops. The introduction of cash crop production not only changed the gender division of labour but also limited the quantity and quality of land set aside for the production of food crops. In addition, women lost control over land, tools, labour and marketing of the surplus subsistence food crops, though a majority of women retained control. Thus, a decline in the quantity of land earmarked for food crop production limited women's control over subsistence production.

Indeed, an examination of the quantity of land set aside for the production of food crops in Western Province reveals the contradictory situation in which women found themselves. An increase in female labour did not necessarily imply an increase in control over the products of their labour and means of production, that is, land and tools.

The Importance of Female and Child Labour: Capital accumulation processes in Kenya, 1939-1985.

The importance of female and child labour in agricultural production cannot be overstated. Women and children's persistent participation in rural subsistence economy was crucial for settlers' capital accumulation and expansion processes in Kenya. This was achieved in a variety of ways. Women produced the foodstuffs and supported the household in the absence of their husbands. Women subsidized their husband's low incomes and this as a result enabled employers to pay meagre wages to their workers and to maintain a low wage structure. Consequently, European and Indian entrepreneurs made huge profits to the detriment of both Kenyan men and women. But, because of the patriarchal norms inherent in African communities, women were affected more severely than men.

During the colonial period in Kenya, wages paid to African labourers, to maintain a family's subsistence especially farm labourers, were low. W.E.Owen pointed out, "no African could support a wife and family, even a small one in the reserve on a cash wage of 30 cents a day."<sup>58</sup> Here, the observation made by Barbara Rogers is worth quoting. She argues, "in many cases where women are officially classified as 'dependants' of a household head, it is clear that in fact

---

<sup>58</sup> W.E.Owen, Minority Report, letter from W.E.Owen to Governor, Kenya Colony, January 26th, 1942.



they play a crucial part in the maintenance of individuals in that grouping, and that in some cases, the man classified as 'head' might more accurately be described as a dependant from the point of view of productive activity."<sup>59</sup> This quotation summarizes the situation in Western Province.

Colonial officials agreed with the missionaries that African labourers were subsidized by their families, and thus were never completely dependent on employment. However, while missionaries urged the colonial state to subsidize the African workers, the colonial officials argued that African labourers were offered employment on the understanding that they had a supplementary income from the land, and consequently did not require higher wages. Indeed, the Report on the Conditions of Labour in East Africa by Granville Orde Brown, observed:

The degree of the African's independence of paid work for his family's subsistence and the resultant low wages paid to him means that in effect the majority of African labour is subsidized by the crops grown on his family holdings in the native land units.<sup>60</sup>

In Kenya, especially in Western Province, where males migrated to settler and urban areas in large numbers, women and children's participation in subsistence production and

---

<sup>59</sup> Rogers, Domestication, p.109.

<sup>60</sup> Major Sir Granville Orde Brown was the labour adviser for the Secretary of State for the Colonies in the first half of the 1940s. For more details on this report, see, KNA, Lab 5/22, Labour Reports and Returns: Report by Major Sir Granville Orde Browne, 1945.

reproductive activities was crucial to family survival. The Governor of Kenya admitted this when he stated:

The African's freedom from complete dependence on paid work for his family's subsistence and the wages which he is therefore able to accept, mean in effect, that a large part of African labour is subsidized by the crops grown on family holdings in the native land units.<sup>61</sup>

Similar observations were made by other colonial officials.<sup>62</sup> Thus both missionaries and officials were agreed. Where they differed was that missionaries opposed it, while officials saw no alternative and tended to justify it. These arguments show that colonial officials were well aware of the labour participation in rural subsistence production in Kenya, and its role in the process of capital accumulation for the settlers.

The missionaries and other humanitarians in Kenya opposed this system whereby the wages of male labour migrants were subsidized by the rural subsistence economy. African labourers, missionaries argued, lacked any form of social insurance. As a result, land represented the main form of social security. Consequently, many African labourers left their wives and families in the rural areas because, if they did not as Beecher correctly argued, "this would inevitably result in most cases, in their losing rights to land within

---

<sup>61</sup> CO 822/130/2, letter from the Governor, of Kenya to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Arthur Creech Jones, January 21st, 1947.

<sup>62</sup> Lab 9/2, in a statement on labour policy in Kenya, the Labour Commissioner Hyde Clarke.

the Native land units. Some are already landless." <sup>63</sup> Therefore, the presence of women in the rural areas served two important functions. First, they continued to work their husband's piece of land and thus confirmed his right of occupation. Second, the wife, in the husband's absence, continued to sustain the worker's family. This situation was aptly summarized by L. J. Beecher as follows:

Land represented social security to the African, he could afford to work for wages of the order to which we have become accustomed in this country if his wife continued to work his gardens in the Reserve and was assured that he could return to the reserve when his employable days were ended.<sup>64</sup>

The system facilitated the process of settler and Indian capital accumulation processes in Kenya. While colonial officials argued that the possession of land by the Africans was the cause of low male labour productivity, missionaries challenged this argument and blamed the inefficiency of the system itself. African labourers lacked an alternative form of social insurance and land served as their main form of social security. Hence, African labourers were subsidized by the labour of their wives and children who worked on the land in the rural area.

---

<sup>63</sup> C.M.S 1/146, 1942-1945, a preliminary note on labour policy in Kenya Colony, primarily in connection with a proposal to sanction the importation of labour from the mandated Territory of Ruanda-Urundi by Rev. L.J. Beecher.

<sup>64</sup> C.M.S, 1/146, Report by Rev. L.J. Beecher, Ibid., 1942-1945.

Not surprisingly, the African labourers in Kenya did not fear the sanction of the 'sack' because they were not totally dependent on wages. Wages were used for the payment of taxes. Wages were inadequate but the colonial state was not in favour of creating alternative social security for the African employees. The colonial officials opposed any suggestions to establish social insurance plans for the African employees. Hence the colonial officials maintained, "this colony is in a comparatively early stage of development and that measures of social security such as this would be beyond the economic capacity at the present stage. Moreover, generally speaking, social security from the African point of view is found on the land and in the clan system."<sup>65</sup>

A bulletin on labour pointed out that, "the majority of Africans still have stock and land interests and that, therefore, they are never completely dependent on employment, that they are very rarely worried about getting the sack."<sup>66</sup> Consequently, it was noted:

It is not surprising that an African, consciously or otherwise, tries to cling on to his most beneficent form of social security. He must keep returning to his reserve to assure for himself his rights and privileges to his piece of land. Herein

---

<sup>65</sup> CO 859/146/3, Sickness Insurance ( Industry etc) Report on measures taken to give effect to the provisions of the convention concerning sickness insurance for workers in industry and commerce and domestic servants - in accordance with the International Labour Organisation from the Government of Kenya for the period 1:10:1947-30:9:1948.

<sup>66</sup> E.A.S, 21/7/1949.

lies the reason why the average worker in Kenya fears little the sanction of the "sack". He regards wages as something desirable but not as an essential prerequisite to live - they tend to be a supplementary form of wealth to the migratory worker who has land in his reserve.<sup>67</sup>

It was not until the 1950s that the Kenyan government began to argue that this system of subsidized migrant labour needed fundamental reform. In this connection, in 1953, Sir Michael Blundell, the Minister of Agriculture in the colonial government of Kenya tabled a motion which stated, "in view of the necessity of creating an economy which would remove the African from dependence solely on the land, and provide a balanced family life, a select committee should be appointed to consider and report upon the adequacy of African cash wages and other conditions and benefits of employment."<sup>68</sup> Contributing to the motion, Humphrey Slade, (Aberdares) who was to become speaker to the National Assembly in independent Kenya stated:

Many Africans had been offered and had accepted wages based on the assumption that they had another means of subsistence from land, either as a resident labourer on farms or on account of holdings in their own land units. The second was that, because of this, many Africans lived away from their wives and children and therefore suffered the effects of a broken family life. The third fact was that the population of the tribes in the Colony was increasing so fast that some tribes were already too numerous for land subsistence alone, and some would soon become so.... The last

---

<sup>67</sup> CO 822/192, Report on Agrarian Policy for Dealing with Population Increase, Land Tenure and Fragmentation in Kenya, 3/9/1952.

<sup>68</sup> E.A.S., 21/2/1953.

fact was that the average output of the African unskilled labourer was remarkably low. The most obvious problem arising from these facts was how to provide employment for Africans so that they might be independent of the land. The next was how to provide them with employment that would allow them to live with their wives and families ... Many of our troubles in the criminal world arise from the neglect of children.<sup>69</sup>

Supporting the motion, C. H. Hartwell pointed out that, "it was the government's opinion that an investigation of wages and productivity was necessary. However, he reported that as a result of a number of social and economic factors peculiar to East Africa, we have a state of affairs in which large numbers of workers in agriculture, industry and public employment are paid wages which are not sufficient to maintain the worker and his family. They must therefore rely on a supplementary income obtained from native land units."<sup>70</sup> This income, of course, was provided by female and child labour.

Male labour migration was therefore responsible for the increased feminization of agriculture in Western Province in particular and Kenya in general. Indeed, as the colonial officials correctly pointed out, "often a worker leaves his family in his reserve to cultivate his land for him in his absence. For long periods, the head of the family, and sometimes all the adult males of the family will be away at work and may not see their wives and children for many months.

---

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

This stabs at the heart of native stability."<sup>71</sup> Feminization of rural agriculture was encouraged as a result of male labour withdrawal from the rural areas. Women and children worked on their husband's or father's farms. They were the providers of labour but not the owners of the means of production, land. Feminization of agriculture was not accompanied by the feminization of the means of production.

### Conclusion

In a critique of the introduction of agricultural technology in Africa, June Nash argued, "in Africa where women provide 70 percent of the labour force, the contradictory decisions made in introducing technology reveal the class and patriarchal biases of the innovators."<sup>72</sup> This chapter has argued that women and children's participation in the rural subsistence economy was sustained through the use of traditional technology, mostly by the hoe. The hoe was not a labour saving technology. It did not alleviate the burden of women and children in rural agricultural production. As a result, lack of appropriate technology made agricultural production a labour intensive activity, mainly provided by women and children.

---

<sup>71</sup> CO 822/192, Ibid., 3/9/1952.

<sup>72</sup> June Nash, "Implications of Technological Change for Household Level and Rural Development," Working Paper No.37, East Lansing: Michigan State University, 1983, p.2.

Indeed, children's labour was essential for the general functioning of the household. Their contribution to other domestic chores was critical and instrumental in enabling women to concentrate on agricultural production activities. These children's activities included herding, fetching water, collecting firewood and, most important, taking care of other younger children and preparing light meals during the day.

Clearly, women's agricultural participation cross-culturally, whether as fully proletarianized, temporary workers, or subsistence producers on plantations, has helped maintain low wages. Boserup, using evidence from Asian and African countries, concluded that plantations circumvent the payment of a family wage to the male by relying on women's agricultural participation as a rural producer or as a rural wage-earner.<sup>73</sup> In the West Indian plantations, Mina Caufield observed:

the recruitment of entire families by plantation owners enables them to utilize the wage labour of women and children only during peak agricultural periods. Plantation owners can then rely on women's subsistence production of food to feed their families from small plots provided to them. Thus, this use of the labour performed by women and children maintains the male wage at absolute minimum.<sup>74</sup>

---

<sup>73</sup> Boserup, Woman's Role in Economic Development, pp.77-78.

<sup>74</sup> Mina Davis Caufield, "Imperialism, the Family and Cultures of Resistance" in Socialist Revolutions, No.20, Oct.1974, pp.67-85.



Undoubtedly, in Kenya, as elsewhere in the world, women and children's participation in the rural subsistence economy was crucial and facilitated the process of settler capital accumulation, based on sub-subsistence wages to male migrant labourers.

At the same time, the erosion of women's autonomy in the production of food crops is reflected in the decline of the area set aside for the production of foodstuffs.<sup>75</sup> Women's control over food crops has declined in significant ways. The low acreage set aside for food crop production has also resulted in food shortages in most recent years, thus contributing in significant ways to the present economic crisis in Kenya.

It is, however, important to recognise that there are differences in the extent to which rural women are burdened by farming and domestic labour. The few women in relatively wealthier households can hire some labour, purchase cooking fuel and water and finance or exchange communal working parties with greater frequency than women in poorer households. Therefore, in considering the question of gender division of labour in rural economies, the issue of class and class differences must also be considered. However, the

---

<sup>75</sup> Production figures from Western Province are not available, however, the general trend has been that the expansion of cash crops is largely achieved at the expense of former food crop areas.

percentage of women from wealthier households was very small, and they were the rare exception rather than the general rule.

Finally, the evidence indicates that women's autonomy was eroded as a result of changes in the gender division of labour and allocation of resources in the production processes. Patriarchal control over female and child labour ensured that the restructured gender division of labour did not result in increased work for men in agricultural production. Women's control over subsistence food production was undermined through the introduction of cash crops. Decline in their control over food crop production did not mean that their labour contribution in agricultural production also declined. On the contrary, women and children's labour contribution in agricultural production intensified with the expansion of cash crop production. These changes in female and child labour and their participation in cash crop production are discussed in the next chapter where it will be shown that while male labour declined from 30% to 20% on the rural farm, female and child labour rose from 70% to 80%.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Female and Child Labour in the Rural Cash Crop Production: Western Province in the 20th Century

During the colonial era the nature of female and child work in agriculture changed in significant ways by becoming part and parcel of the new colonial system of production. Because of the central position women and children occupied in the production of cash crops, their labour was vital for capitalist accumulation and expansion in Kenya. This chapter will focus upon the emergence of cash crop production particularly cotton and maize, the depletion of the male population during the Second World War and the remarkable rise in production which women and children achieved. After the war Kenyan peasants were permitted to grow other cash crops such as coffee, tea, tobacco and sugar. From the 1950's schools began to seriously remove child labour from the land which had a serious impact upon women, far more drastic than when the males had left. However to link chapter three on food crops and chapter four on cash crops the first focus will be on the changing proportions and labouring hours in male, female and child labour in the Western Province.

### Time-Allocation and Agricultural Production in Western Province.

In 1936, a survey of labour allocation carried out in North Kavirondo confirmed the enormous contributions made by

women in agricultural production. The tables 1 present some of the results established by the labour survey. Indeed, the 1936 survey represents the first attempt by the colonial government to produce a time-budget study of the various activities performed by men, women and children in agricultural production. The purpose of the colonial study was not to establish a time-budget. The study was intended to justify the low prices paid for the cash crops of Kenyan peasants. The colonial authorities were attempting to estimate what might be considered a fair price to pay for food crops. Thus they sought to calculate the labour hours required to produce various crops, the value of that labour and the price which would encourage production.

Several conclusions can be drawn from table 1 showing the time-budget and different agricultural activities performed by men, women and children. The tables confirm the fact that women contributed more labour time in agricultural production than men in all crops but particularly in the case of sorghum. The tables provide conclusive quantitative evidence to support the argument that female labour was crucial in both subsistence and cash crop production activities in the rural economy of Western Province.

The table also demonstrate that female and child labour were devalued.<sup>1</sup> The labour for both were valued less than for

---

<sup>1</sup> For more details, see Elizabeth Schmidt, "Hunters, Farmers and Gold-Washers," footnote No.91.

men, despite working long hours. Women suffered particularly as they spent the longest hours in agricultural production

Table 1

Time Allocation in Agricultural Production: Western Province<sup>2</sup>

Traditional Food Crops

Eleusine, Sorghum (round brackets), Sesame [square brackets]

Cultivation operations	Hours required per acre					
	Men		Women		Children	
Clearing	100	[24]	50		50	
Breaking	100	(16)	100	(16)	100	(16)
Preparatory						
Cultivation	60	[50]	60	[50]	60	
Planting	10	[10]	10	(15) [10]		(15)
Post-cultivation	100	(5) [30]	150	(10) [70]	50	(10) [70]
Harvesting	20	(10) [50]	20	(25) [50]	20	(25) [50]
Preparation						
for market		[30]	20	(24) [20]	20	(24) [20]
Transport						
to market	-	-	30	(56) [15]	30	(28) [15]
Total hours	390	(31) [170]	440	(146) [215]	330	(118) [155]
% of total	34%	(11) [29]	38%	(49) [36]	28%	(40) [26]
Labour value						
per hour in cts.	5	(6.3) [5]	4	(5) [4]	2	(2.5) [2]

activities. Gender ideology (both African and European) facilitated this devaluation. The difference in the cost of labour per hour between men and women reflected an element of this gender ideology. The survey, which evaluated the cost of production of indigenous produce was, intended to justify the low prices paid for the cash crops of Kenyan peasants.

<sup>2</sup> This data on time-budget was culled from the 1936 survey on peasant agriculture and allocation of tasks carried out by the Department of Agriculture. For more information, see, KNA, Agr/1/10, 1936-1945.

Colonial officials argued that the unpaid labour of African women and children had less value than that of males. Women and children's unremunerated labour was thus used as an excuse to justify the lower prices paid for African as opposed to European produced grain. The low prices offered for peasant cash crops in Kenya enabled the state to procure cheap export commodities and foodstuffs to feed the cheap labour working on settler plantations, estates and in the Public Works Department [PWD]. Cheap exportable commodities enhanced the process of capital accumulation by the settlers. Cheap foodstuffs were siphoned out of the reserves, where female and child labour was thoroughly exploited.

The survey on peasant time allocation and production activities was carried out in response to criticisms by the missionaries and other humanitarian lobbies on the use and misuse of female and child labour in Kenya. Second, the survey was done to justify male labour migration. The survey proved that the male labour contribution in rural subsistence production was minimal, and consequently that women were not exploited by male labour migration. During the colonial period, some subsistence crops acquired a market value and had to be transported to a market. Others, which were originally cash crops, acquired dual status: food and cash crop, for example maize.

Transport should have greatly affected price. However the colonial survey chose to estimate price on the basis of

head-loading- exclusively by women and children- and therefore costed in the case of eleusine and sesame at four cents per hour for women and two for children. Other modes of transport were becoming available but were uneconomic because of the prices offered. Ironically the North Kavirondo annual Report argued that, "following upon propaganda concerning ox-transport, a few carts have been purchased, the use of pack donkeys and pack oxen has also been advocated for the transport of produce to market, but the people are very slow to accept this suggestion."<sup>3</sup> My data concurs with Van Zwanenberg's conclusion that, "all this evidence to achieve efficient transport should not, however, be allowed to obscure the obvious fact that the majority of trade goods were still carried by head-load in the traditional manner."<sup>4</sup> While ploughing- a male labour-saving device- was costed into production by colonial authorities, donkey or lorry transport- female labour-saving devices- were not. Rather than facing the economic fact that the prices offered did not permit these newer forms of transport, colonial officials preferred to blame the people as being "very slow to accept this suggestion."

Table 1 demonstrates the potential labour hours required for the cultivation of one acre of three traditional crops.

---

<sup>3</sup> KNA, North Kavirondo Annual Report, 1934.

<sup>4</sup> R.M.A Van Zwanenberg, "The Development of Peasant Commodity Production in Kenya, 1920-1940," Economic History Review, Vol.27, No.3, 1974, p. 453.

For all three crops the male contribution is less than that of women and in hours about equal to that of children. The greatest contribution of men was to the basic staple eleusine, the least to sorghum which was employed mainly by women to brew beer. Eleusine was a highly labour intensive crop. For all category of workers it required more labour than the other two combined. Sorghum required the least labour. Overall table 1 shows that men contributed around 30% of labour while women and children made up the remaining 70%. Despite the fact that the statistics upon which table 1 is based were collected in the 1930's, it will be assumed that the division of labour had remained somewhat constant such that these figures were fairly representative of the late pre-colonial and early colonial eras.

Ignoring labour migration and other influencing factors, Table 2 plots the hours involved in production and the changing percentages for a typical- if fictitious-peasant farm over the colonial period. In section one, figures are provided for a seven acre farm as it might have been traditionally. It shows total hours worked by men as 1402 or slightly above the average 1,000 hours given by H.Cleave for African males.<sup>5</sup> Children worked slightly longer. Women worked over 2,000 hours or equal to the average for European males. This refers only to time involved in agriculture and

---

<sup>5</sup> J.H.Cleave, African Farmers: Labour Use in the Development of Smallholder Agriculture, (New York: Praeger, 1974).



Table 2

(1) Seven-Acre Farm Labour: Traditional

Crops	Acres	Total hours worked		
		Men	Women	Children
Eleusine	3	1170	1320	990
Scorghum	2	62	292	236
Sesame	1	170	215	155
Wife's plot	1	-	226	173
Total hours		1402	2053	1554
% of total		28%	41%	+ 31% = 72%

(2) The Same Farm: Substituting Maize for Eleusine

	Men	Women	Children
Maize 3 acres	312	492	108
Tot. farm hours	544	1225	672
% of total	22%	50%	+ 28% = 78%

(3) The Same Farm: Adding another Acre and Cash Crops by Hoe Cultivation

	Acres	Men	Women	Children
Maize	2	208	328	72
Sorghum	1	31	146	118
Groundnuts	1	245	275	220
Cotton	3	288	870	39
Wife's plot	1	-	226	173
Total hours		772	1845	662
% of total		24%	57%	+ 19% = 76%

(4) The Same Farm: Adding another Acre and Ploughing for Cotton

	Acres	Men	Women	Children
Maize	2	208	328	72
Sorghum	1	31	146	118
Groundnuts	1	245	275	220
Cotton	4	192	1160	52
Wife's plot	1	-	226	173
Total hours		672	2135	635
% of total		20%	62%	+ 18% = 80%

says nothing of women's domestic work. Colonial figures upon which table 2 was based were looking at production, not reproduction.

The popularity of maize created a drastic change in total hours. Section two calculates the labour hours required for the same farm on the assumption that the three acres of eleusine had been replaced by maize. Labour hours are cut drastically, most substantially in the case of men. While the traditional farm needed 1400 hours, the introduction of maize reduced this to 544 hours. Women's total hours were cut from 2,000 to 1225 per year. However the allotment of time moved in favour of the men and children and against the women. The maize farm reduced the percentage of male labour in the total from 28% to 22%, and raised that of women from 41% to 50%. Women and children together performed 72% of labour on the traditional farm and 78% on the maize farm. While there were

many other reasons which promoted the popularization of maize, the much reduced hours needed to produce it surely must have accounted for something in peasant family calculations.

Maize had another significant effect. It permitted the introduction of cash crops. The labour hours freed up by abandoning eleusine began to be used for cash crops, in this case cotton and groundnuts. In section three the same fictitious farm now using maize as a staple and adding an extra acre of cultivation has chosen to plant three acres of cotton. Sometimes it has been suggested that male labour rose with cash crops. The rise appears to be minimal, from 22% to 24% of the total required for production. Males still only contributed 772 hours to farm labour. Child labour also continued to decline and one cannot attribute this to schooling since very few had yet entered school in the 1930's when maize and cash crops were taking hold. What is really surprising is that women's hours rose to 57% of the total.

In section four the calculations apply to the same farm which has added another acre of cultivation as a result of the plough. As a percent of the total and in the number of hours worked the figures for males again decline. From performing 24% of the total labour, they have continued to drop to 20%. For an unknown reason the plough also reduced the hours in which children worked on the land. Women's labour rose to 2135 hours which represented 62% of the total. It should further be noted that these statistics are impervious to male

migration. The figures were calculated at the same time and they demonstrate that as new crops came into production, more and more labour was hoisted on to women.

Consequently table 2 demonstrates that the changing pattern of crops from C.1900 to 1939 on a peasant farm allowed males to reduce their labouring hours in agriculture from 1400 to 672 and their percentage from 28% to 20%, women and children increased from 72% to 80%. However because children enjoyed the greatest drop from 1554 to 635 hours and from 31% to 18% it was women who picked up the difference. Their contribution to family agriculture rose from 41% to 62%. There is another way of approaching these statistics. Comparing labour hours between 1900 and 1939 women's hours had risen by 4%, children had dropped by 41% and men by 48%. Thus males had almost reduced their work load by half.

The figures suggest that the women's work load had only increased 4% between 1900 and 1939. Let us assume that the grandmothers of the present informants worked during the 1920's when maize became popular. Let us assume that in their reporting they are comparing their work load to that of their grandmothers. If that were so the women's hours have increased by 74%. Furthermore modern women's discontent might arise, less because of the increase in total hours and more because the distribution of labour in the family has shifted so heavily against them and in the favour of males. While the female burden has risen, that of the males has been halved.

The statistical record of the "fictitious" farm in table 2 also shows that in 1939 women could have picked up the total hours of males and still have worked under the average agricultural hours for a south east Asian male. The massive migration of males which accompanied the war effort would require that the women shoulder their entire burden. This record also demonstrates that African agriculture need not suffer if males withdraw from the land. The real disaster would arise when the drift to the towns removed women from the farms.

#### The Introduction of Peasant Cash Crop Production in Western Province

By the 1920s, colonial agrarian policy in Kenya shifted and recognised the need to encourage Africans to grow cash crops. Peasant cultivators were encouraged to grow cash crops, particularly cotton, maize and wattle bark.<sup>6</sup> Because of their low profitability, settlers had little interest in these products. In Western Kenya, the department of agriculture embarked on campaigns which specifically promoted

---

<sup>6</sup> Both Van Zwanenberg and King have emphasised the fact that cotton and wattle bark offered low cash returns and Europeans did not think them worth their while. Cotton was labour-intensive and fetched very low prices indeed. For details see R.M.A. Van Zwanenberg and Anne King, An Economic History of Kenya and Uganda 1800-1970, (New Jersey, Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1975), p. 40.

and encouraged the production of cotton and maize.<sup>7</sup> The distribution of free seeds was encouraged and sustained at all levels.

In Kenya, the final demarcation of African reserves was completed in 1926. The reserves served as sources of cheap labour for the settler areas and also as a source of cheap export and foodstuffs to feed labour on settler farms and public works department [PWD]. The dual function of the reserves was endorsed by the 1926 East African governor's conference, which stated:

The policy of government in this connection is a dual policy, namely, both economic development by natives in the Reserves and general development of the country as a whole, and that steady co-operation in both is expected of the native population.<sup>8</sup>

The dual policy of development was defined by Robert Coryndon, then governor of Kenya, as the "complimentary development of native and non-native production."<sup>9</sup> This policy received strong criticism from settler leaders who opposed agricultural

---

<sup>7</sup> E.A. Brett notes that, "the campaign of 1922-3 produced a very large expansion, the gross neglect from 1925 to 1930 produced virtual stagnation despite buoyant prices. For details, see Brett, Colonialism and Underdevelopment in East Africa: The Politics of Economic Change 1919-39, (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1973), pp.205-207.

<sup>8</sup> CO533/413/17, Circular No.4 from the Native Affairs Department [NAD] to all administrative officers, 20th January 1927.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., CO533/413/17

development in African reserves.<sup>10</sup> They argued that such development would endanger the cheap labour supply, the very backbone of the settler economy in the country. Settlers also feared competition from African cash crop producers.

However, the official colonial policy on cash crop production protected the interests of settlers. Contrary to settler assumptions, the main objective of the dual policy of development was to synthesize and synchronize the exploitation of both cheap labour from the reserves and cheap cash crops. The objective of the dual policy was to enhance the process of accumulation of capital. This was clearly spelt out by the East African governor's conference. As they argued, "steady progress could not be secured in some areas unless able-bodied natives (sic) who shows no tendency to work is given to understand that the government expects him to do a reasonable amount of work either in production in his own reserve or labour for wages outside it".<sup>11</sup> In other words, the colonial government wanted to encourage cash crop production by Kenyan peasants and male migrant labourers. This policy in no way ignored the importance of a continuous supply of cheap male labour needed for production on settler farms.

---

<sup>10</sup> Wolff pointed out that the European community opposed any systematic governmental aid to African agriculture for fear that such pursuits would make the African unavailable for wage labour on European plantations. For details see Richard D. Wolff, The Economics of Colonialism Britain and Kenya, 1870-1930, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), p. 82.

<sup>11</sup> CO533/413/17, Circular No. 4, 1927.

Although Kenya was committed to the 'dual policy of development' that is, a combination of European and African peasant production, a series of severe limitations were imposed, which affected peasant cash crop production in diverse ways. For instance, the governors of East Africa agreed, "in areas open to settlement, government should encourage the growth of those crops for which the least labour is required, and, where necessary regulate the growth of those which make heavy demands on labour for a short period in the year. The European coffee crop was an example."<sup>12</sup> This was intended to discourage any competition between settler and peasant producers.<sup>13</sup> This opposition was based on two facts. First, that the introduction of African coffee cultivation would spread disease, damage the good name of Kenya coffee, and encourage theft from European coffee estates. But more fundamentally, African coffee production would have raised the rewards for labour on African farms thereby reducing the supply available on European farms.<sup>14</sup> Ironically, the same cash crops which Kenyan peasants were not allowed to grow on the basis of lack of efficiency were grown by peasants in the

---

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., C0533/413/17

<sup>13</sup> Van Zwanenberg and King, An Economic History of Kenya and Uganda, p. 40.

<sup>14</sup> For more details, see Judith Heyer and J.K.Waweru, "The Development of the Small Farm Areas" in Judith Heyer et. al., Agricultural Development in Kenya: An Economic Assessment, (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 193. See L.Smith, "An Overview of Agricultural Development Policy" in Judith Heyer et. al., Ibid., p.116.



neighbouring countries of Uganda and Tanganyika. In truth, Kenyan peasants were only allowed to grow cash crops which European settler farmers were unwilling to produce because of their low market value.<sup>15</sup> Cotton was one of these crops.

#### Production of Cotton in Western Province, 1920-1939

The production of cotton was mainly restricted to the region around the Kenya-Uganda border. The cotton railway (the Butere line) was planned, and in 1925, an Empire Cotton Growing Association visited the area. The colonial government, through the Department of Agriculture, intensified campaigns which encouraged and promoted the production of cotton in the region. An examination of cotton production figures suggests that, contrary to the situation around the lake region, cotton production in Western Province was successful. Cotton production seemed impervious to price. During the 1920's the Western Province produced an average of one and half million pounds annually. Prices gradually dropped during that period from 25 cents per pound to 13. Production began to rise during 1932-33 even though prices had dropped to 9 to 11 cents per pound. The real dramatic jump in production occurred between 1936 and 1939 when production

---

<sup>15</sup> Wolff has emphasised that by 1910, the European farming community had quite definitely rejected cotton, The Economics of Colonialism, p. 82. See also Van Zwanenberg and King, The Economic History of Kenya and Uganda, p. 40.

averaged almost 18.5 million pounds. Prices in 1937 to 1939 were eight cents per pound. Since cotton production rose while prices dropped, the reasons appear to lie elsewhere. Table 2 would suggest that cultivating cotton depended upon the rapidity with which peasants were able to switch from eleusine to the less labour intensive maize. There is no evidence that colonial authorities knew this. The amazing leap in production after 1936 can only be explained it seems by the growing popularity of the plough and the increasing acreage of cultivation which that permitted. The acreage in North Kavirondo in 1931 of about 5,000 acres had increased to 31,000 by 1937 and 76,000 in 1956.<sup>16</sup>

Table 3

Acreage under Cotton in Western Province by 1939

Location	Aver. size of farms	No. of Farms	Total Acreage
Malakisi	0.80 acres	5,270	4,240
S. Bukusu	0.90 "	1,720	1,620
Iteso	1.04 "	18,210	18,900
Bukhayo	1.00 "	3,930	8,950
Marach	0.76 "	10,900	8,260
N. Wanga	0.47 "	1,480	700
S. Wanga	0.29 "	1,510	450
Buholo	0.14 "	1,100	150
Total			38,270.

Source: North Kavirondo Annual Report, 1941.

Table 3 suggests that cotton acreage increased by over 7,000

<sup>16</sup> KNA, Department of Agriculture, Annual Report, 1956, p.19.

acres or 22.58 percent over the previous acreage.

Expansion in the acreage under cotton also implies that there was an increase in the supply of labour because cotton is a relatively labour-intensive crop, although the returns per acre and returns of labour was much smaller than for coffee. Expansion of cotton required more labour from women and children. This was even more so because of massive male labour migration. As Sharon Stichter has correctly argued, "the absence of any substantial change in African agricultural technology or organisation in this period, coupled with the high level of male absenteeism points to the conclusion that the bulk of the increased agricultural labour fell on the women."<sup>17</sup> This point was stressed by missionaries in Kenya on many occasions. The missionaries were particularly eloquent in their attacks on the consequences of male migrant labour for women and children. In a critique of the male migrant labour system in Kenya, W.E.Owen argued:

The most potent factor, since our rule in Kenya, which has increased the burden imposed upon the women has been the demand for the labour of the men on the part of non-African employers. These men leave home to seek for the tax money in large numbers, and of course this throws a very heavy burden on the women who remain behind to keep the home going.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Sharon Stichter, "Women and the Labour Force in Kenya 1895-1964" in Rural Africana, Winter 1975-1976, p.48. See also Sharon Stichter, Migrant Labour in Kenya, Capitalism and African Response, 1895-1975, (London: Longmann, 1982).

<sup>18</sup> CO 533/408/10, Letter to the editor, Manchester Guardian, 7th March 1931, by W.E.Owen.

Similarly, on the question of male labour migration from Western Province, Wagner observed that:

... in 1932, about 20% and in 1937, about 30% of adult male of the district [and probably an even higher percentage among the Logoli ] was at any given time of the year away from the Reserve. A large number serve a six months' contract as farm labourers in the European Highlands, while the remainder are employed on a long-term basis as domestic servants and in various skilled and semi-skilled occupations.<sup>19</sup>

Even when male heads of households stayed in the rural area, their contribution of manual agricultural labour was limited. This was also determined by the class position of individual households. Men from rich peasant households only supervised female and child labour in agricultural production activities. Women and children from rich peasant households were less burdened with agricultural responsibilities because where wage labour was employed, the use of family labour tended to drop.<sup>20</sup> However for the average household which hired a plough for breaking the land the comparison between hoe and plough cultivation have been set out in tables 4 and 5. These tables exhibit several peculiarities as for example the unbelievable difference in the labour of children. Ignoring the children, they do show that male and female

---

<sup>19</sup> Wagner, The Bantu of Western Kenya, p.94.

<sup>20</sup> Kitching has pointed out that in richer households, there was increasing use of ploughs and hired labour. The extra labour input required by the plough was provided by the women of poorer households. Thus, there was an apparent process of withdrawal of agricultural labour on their own land by women in poorer households. See Class and Economic Change in Kenya, p.93.

labour were greatly reduced by the plough. For the same labour hours a family could cultivate two acres with a plough as against one with the hoe. However the most striking fact is the manner in which the plough altered the gender distribution of labour. The male percentage of total cultivation labour dropped from 24 to 17% while women and children's rose from 76 to 83%. Nevertheless the plough may have become popular so quickly because it reduced labour requirements for both men and women. This is probably the major reason why cotton production rose from 1.5 million pounds to 18.5 million within a decade. Price was probably irrelevant because there was no option, since peasant farms were forbidden to produce other cash crops which carried higher prices, a market monopolized by the settlers.

Table 4

Plough Cotton: Time-budget Survey in Western Province, 1930's

Crop: <u>Cotton</u> . [Malakisi] Cultivation operations:	Hours required per acre.		
	<u>Man</u>	<u>Woman</u>	<u>Children</u> .
Breaking... [by plough]	16	16	16
Preparatory cultivation	4	6	6
Planting	-	16	16
After cultivation	10	10	10
Harvesting	10	25	25
Preparation for market	-	10	10
Transport to market	8	40	30
Total hours	<hr/> 48 (17%) 123 (43%) 113 (40%)		
Value of labour per hour:	6.3cts.	5cts.	2.5cts.
Average yield per acre in the main areas of production:	150lbs, if not damaged by stock 70 percent A, and 30 percent B.		
Seed required per acre	15lbs. Implements and tools:		
depreciation per acre	shs.5.		
<u>Other Costs:</u>			

A 'native' does not dig his own shamba [farm], but he hoes and ploughs at the rate of about shs.10 per acre.  
 Period during which the crop occupies the ground: 7 to 8 months.  
 Minimum attractive price 10cts per pound seed cotton.

Table 5

Hoe Cotton: Time-budget Survey in Western Province, 1930's

Crop: Cotton.

Cultivation operations:	Hours required per acre.		
	<u>Man</u>	<u>Woman</u>	<u>Children</u>
Breaking	90	-	-
Preparatory cultivation	-	24	-
Planting	6	6	6
After cultivation	-	162	-
Harvesting	-	70	-
Preparation for market	-	7	7
Transport	-	21	-
Total hours			
	96 (24%)	290 (73%)	13 (3%)

Value of labour per hour 3cts. 2.5cts. 1.5cts.

Average yield per acre in the main areas of production-300lbs.  
 [Worked as if all cultivation was done by hand. Total cost per acre was estimated at shs.10/67. As a result the agricultural officer suggested a minimum static [emphasis added] price of 10cts. per pound of cotton as a necessary price to maintain production at a high level.]

During the colonial period in Western Province, female children assisted their mothers more than male children. In most cases, male children migrated to work on settler plantation farms.<sup>21</sup> Consequently, female children made more substantial contributions in rural agricultural production than male children.

<sup>21</sup> KNA, Dc/56/9. Available evidence suggests there were more male child labour migrants than female.

Production of Maize in Western Province, 1920-1985

At the beginning of the 20th century, maize production in Western Province was of limited importance for subsistence. Two different types of maize were cultivated: the yellow and spotted varieties.<sup>22</sup> Spotted maize was usually inter-planted with sorghum or millet crops. Indeed, before 1920, maize did not constitute part of the staple diet of the people of Western Province. Therefore, maize production was not a priority for most people. Maize did not constitute a meal on its own; it was only eaten between meals. What then led to the adoption of maize cash crop production?

The introduction and adoption of maize cash crop production dates back to 1915. First, there was the influence from the European settler farms. African labourers who worked on European farms not only learned the new techniques of ploughing, and ox-training but also acquired other work skills as well as knowledge about new crops like maize. European farmers provided maize for their labourers to eat where males developed a taste for it. Second the missionaries first spread maize in the southern locations of North Kavirondo. It was served in their schools and gained prestige as a consequence. Third, colonial authorities encouraged maize

---

<sup>22</sup> H. Fearn, An African Economy, p. 82. Paul Vermouth, "The beginning of maize cash-cropping in Kimilili 1908-1935." Department of History, University of Nairobi, seminar paper No.13, 1977/78.

production even distributing free seeds.<sup>23</sup> Further, unlike eleusine the staple which it replaced, maize would function as both a food and cash crop. Fifth, the labour requirements for maize were only one third that of eleusine, see table 1. As noted earlier from the total labour point of view cotton could not flourish until maize had replaced finger millet as a staple food. It is therefore hardly surprising that maize began to take off at the same time as cotton production. Production figures are not available but the amount sold into the market is. Sales from North Kavirondo made three significant leaps in production, from about 5,000 bags in 1933 to nearly 11,000 the next year, to about 37,000 in 1936 and to 60,000 in 1939.<sup>24</sup> These jumps in maize closely parallel similar rises in cotton production. Again this proves that labour constraints in small farms dictated that reduction of labour for maize, freed it up for the cultivation of cotton. By 1939 Nyanza Province sales of maize were approaching those of the white settlers and combined with the Central Province, peasant production had far outstripped that of the Europeans. In fact as African sales rose after 1936, settler production

---

<sup>23</sup> Fearn noted that, the introduction of the better quality white maize was facilitated by the distribution of the seed through government supplies obtained from European farms. For details, see An African Economy, p.82.

<sup>24</sup> KNA, North Kavirondo District Annual Report, 1933-1934. See also Agricultural Annual Reports, 1933-1941.



slowly declined.<sup>25</sup> It was extremely significant that this was occurring while the "cotton revolution" was in progress and while these two provinces exported the highest number of males as migrant labourers.

Up to the mid-1930s, most of the maize exported from Western Province was produced in the southern locations of the Province. These included areas around Bunyore, Butere, Idakho, Maragoli, Marama, Kisa and Tiriki. Here, I concur with Kitching's analysis of maize production and export from Western Province. But, only up to 1935, because after that, northern locations of North Kavirondo dominated maize production throughout the colonial period. A report on the progress of maize production noted:

In the North Kavirondo district, special efforts have been directed during the year to increasing the acreage under maize and simsim, and improving the quality of maize clearing. The price of maize rose in December. In Kimilili location progress was made towards real small farms and there are some shambas of twenty to twenty-five acres.<sup>26</sup>

Kitching correctly emphasized the fact that, "North Kavirondo, with 37 per cent of its cultivable land under crops, was agriculturally the most developed Nyanza district."<sup>27</sup> However, by 1935, maize cultivation shifted towards the northern part of the district.

---

<sup>25</sup> KNA, Kenya Farmers' Association, Annual Reports, 1936-1940. See also, Nyanza Province Agricultural Reports, 1936-1940 and Central Province Agricultural Reports, 1936-1940.

<sup>26</sup> KNA, NAD, Annual Report, 1933, p. 78.

<sup>27</sup> Kitching, Class and Economic Change in Kenya, pp. 42-43.

From 1936 onwards, the expansion and increased production of maize in North Kavirondo came mainly from the northern locations of the district. This included Kabras, Kimilili, Broderick Falls (Webuye) and Bungoma. Here I concur with Fearn, who states, "the bulk of maize marketed in Kenya was mainly from Kimilili, South Bukusu and Kabras locations that maize was marketed in any quantity".<sup>28</sup> Some of this maize went to neighbouring towns of Tororo and Mbale in Uganda. In 1937, the annual report noted that, "191 tons of maize meal was also exported mostly to Tororo and beyond."<sup>29</sup> A memorandum on maize production in North Kavirondo emphasized the fact that:

A considerable proportion of this maize is grown by natives who have formed numerous small "companies" and who farm shambas ranging from 20 to 60 acres. These natives are influential and their views represent the greater proportion of the maize growers in the district.<sup>30</sup>

Increased acreage under cultivation required more labour power and longer working time. The existence of twenty to sixty acre farms in Western Province in the 1930's also suggest the emergence of rural social differentiation.

Planting expanded, particularly where ploughs were used.

---

<sup>28</sup> Fearn, An African Economy, p.82. See particularly footnote no.36.

<sup>29</sup> KNA, DAR, North Kavirondo, 1937 and DAR, North Kavirondo, 1938, p.19..

<sup>30</sup> KNA, PC/NZA/3/2/29, Crop production: Specific Crops, Maize, 1933-1939, Memorandum on Bulk Marketing of Produce, Broderick Falls and Butere Godowns by Agricultural Officer, Kakamega.

In the production of maize, men were responsible for the preparation of land and they used the plough in that work. The plough cultivated more land. The plough conserved male labour. As Wagner pointed out, "where ploughs have been intelligently used as in North Kitosh (Bukusu), they have made possible the development of farming units of up to 20 or 30 acres, and have thus contributed essentially to the increase in production."<sup>31</sup> The plough also decreased the labour of women and children per acre.<sup>32</sup> However it seems highly likely that the increased acreage permitted by the plough- this is confirmed by the sales figures- increased overall the total hours worked at least by females. What is rather interesting is that men put in a greater percentage of family labour into maize than any other crop except eleusine. Males seemed to equate maize with eleusine as the basic staple. In both they contributed 34% of the family labour.

---

<sup>31</sup> Wagner, The Bantu of North Kavirondo, Vol 2, p.35.

<sup>32</sup> For details on female and child plough time-budget, see tables 4 and 5, pp. 137-138.

Table 6

Crop: Maize.

Cultivation operations:

Hours required per acre.

	<u>Man</u>	<u>Woman</u>	<u>Children</u>
Breaking [ploughing]	24	-	12
Preparatory cultivation	12	-	6
Planting	12	-	12
After cultivation	-	122	-
Harvesting	50	-	3
Preparation for market	-	42	-
Transport to market	6	-	3
Total hours	104 (34%)	164 (54%)	36 (12%)
Value of labour per hour:	3cts.	2.5cts.	1.5cts.
Average yield per acre in the main areas of production: 7 bags			
Seed required per acre 20lbs.			

Maize: [ As regards this crop, the cost of production is shown for the Kitosh [Bukusu i.e in Bungoma] area entailing the use of implements including ploughs and ox-carts. The cost of production works out at shs.12.46 per acre.

A minimum price of shs.5 per bag would be fair].

Sources: KNA, Ministry of Agriculture, Agr/Ksm/1/10, 1936-1945.

The gender division of labour was more equal for this crop than in any other even given the use of the plough- cultivated cotton. What makes the women's figure so high is the anomaly that while children provided 28% of family labour for eleusine, that drops to 12% for maize. As noted previously this anomaly cannot be explained because in the 1930's very few children were in school and those who were probably belonged to the more wealthy families. For women the greater labour hours required derived from cotton and the increased acreage of maize permitted by the plough and encouraged by the possibility of sales.

Weeding, which was the major labour intensive activity was undertaken by women and children. The production of maize required two weedings. The first weeding was done when the

plants were about three to four weeks old. The second weeding was done when the plants were about three to four months old. This was specifically done to ensure a good harvest. Weeding was done with both traditional and modern English hoes, which were inefficient and cumbersome. Maize production thus increased the labour of weeding without supplying better technology to do the job. In some situations, men also participated in weeding activities but this depended on their ability to hire extra labour during the peak labour seasons.

In Western Province, rich men were able to exchange labour for beer and food. Among the Bukusu, for example, men participated in the weeding of maize, but under very special arrangements. As Wagner stated, "weeding (muliaga) among the Bukusu is mainly men's work. It is usually done in the form of 'beer work': several neighbours come or are summoned to help and as a reward for their services are offered the gamalua gexukuagila, the beer of weeding."<sup>33</sup> Women brewed the beer, which was a labour intensive activity which required careful planning. Women ground sorghum and millet on the traditional grinding stones. This was an extremely difficult process. As Maritina Kamili explained:

Women's palms and knees developed blisters because they knelt for a long time when they ground eleusine and sorghum on the grinding stones.

---

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., vol 2, p. 28. However, among the Maragoli, weeding (okusembera or okwaga) is done exclusively by women, wealthy husbands nowadays sometimes employing additional female labour to assist their wives and daughters in this unpopular task, P. 26.

Grinding eleusine and sorghum took a long time, it was hard work which was done on a daily basis and as a result, women's palms and knees became solid (hardened.)<sup>34</sup>

Regina Elima added, "most women developed backaches because of using grinding stones. Sometimes, a team of girls (14-16 year olds) were invited to grind sorghum. It was a form of training for them and only rich families could afford to do this kind of thing because in such families beer was prepared in large quantities and therefore there was a lot of sorghum, even up to six bags or more to be ground. The team of girls who were invited to grind sorghum were usually paid in kind."<sup>35</sup> In addition, women prepared and served food to the team of working men. However, women and older children also participated in the planting, weeding, harvesting and transporting food from the farm to the stores. Some informants observed that sometimes men send their wives to participate in the beer weeding activities on their behalf. In the end, men drank the beer and enjoyed the food in the absence of their wives.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, weeding was not, as Wagner suggested, men's work among the Bukusu. Men exchanged their labour for beer. In addition, this kind of labour was

---

<sup>34</sup> Maritina Kamili, Kabuchai, Bungoma, Oral interview, 8/2/1988

<sup>35</sup> Regina Elima, Oral interview, Saboti, Bungoma, 14/9/1987.

<sup>36</sup> Luka Namulala, oral interview, Musese, 14/9/1987, Bungoma, and Temeteo Wepukhulu, oral interview, Wamono, 5/11/1987, Bungoma.

not invested on their own farms, but for those who provided the beer. Meanwhile, labour needed for agricultural production on their own plots was provided by their wives and children. Exchange of beer for labour declined during the colonial period because missionaries condemned traditional beer-brewing and drinking, which was interpreted as "barbaric and ungodly". Beer drinking was collectively condemned and discouraged. Consequently, only a few rich non-christian families continued to brew beer, which put even more labour burdens on women and children.

Communal labour in maize production was initially used mainly by rich families. But eventually it was replaced by waged labour. It is however important to point out the fact that only rich families used hired labour, and cultivated large acreages. Therefore the decision to hire extra labour was determined by the class position of individual rural peasant households. In the final analysis, women's contribution in agricultural production processes was far greater than men's as the time-budget tables suggest. This time-budget only deals with family household labour, and thus does not apply to rich peasant families, more prevalent in the northern parts of Western Province particularly in Kimilili, Kabras, Chwele and Webuye regions. It shows that women did more work than men in maize production.

Women were unanimous in declaring hoeing to be the hardest work, but they reckon that it was hard labour which

produced good crops.<sup>37</sup> Susan Wachosi, another oral informant added:

Weeding became even harder when you worked on either settler farmers or even on another person's farm because you were expected to do so much work per day. In addition to that, you had your own weeding to do on your small plot.<sup>38</sup>

Similarly, Paulina Wanyonyi stated that;

Weeding is the hardest part of agricultural work and it determines the quality and quantity of the harvest. Good weeding provide a good harvest, and this can only be appreciated if the work is done on your own farm but not when you work for other people.<sup>39</sup>

The other problem identified by women was the seasonal constraint which led to work overlap and consequent labour intensification. Seasonal labour peaks tend to be particularly high in areas where climatic factors, particularly rainfall, severely limited the cropping season and put a premium on the timeliness of agricultural operations.<sup>40</sup> In addition, Lawrence D. Smith correctly pointed out that:

many of the food crops such as millet and maize grown in Kenya required relatively large labour inputs with marked seasonal labour requirements for planting and harvesting. There was unlikely to be

---

<sup>37</sup> Elizabeth Naliaka, Oral interview, 10/3/1985.

<sup>38</sup> Susan Wachosi, Oral interview, Chebukaka, 4/8/1987.

<sup>39</sup> Pauline Wanyonyi, Oral interview, Chwele, 27/3/1988. Paulina worked as a casual labourer on both settler farms and rich peasant farms from 1940.

<sup>40</sup> For an insightful analysis on this point, see, J.C.de Wilde, Experiences with Agricultural Development in Tropical Africa, (Baltimore, Maryland: The John Hopkins Press, 1967).



much 'surplus' labour at these times and a reduction in the labour supply on the individual peasant holding might have jeopardised the food supply, thus threatening the well being and indeed the survival of the family. As both peasant and settler farming systems were basically governed by the same rainfall patterns, the peak labour requirements for both often coincided.<sup>41</sup>

For men, land clearing and preparation might be the busiest time, but for women it was usually planting and weeding of subsistence and cash crops which is the busiest time. In Western Province, the planting and weeding of food crops was done from March to July. This coincided with the planting and weeding of cash crops like cotton and maize which began in March and went on up to November. In addition, women performed domestic as well as farm work, and therefore they usually experienced higher labour peaks than men. Clearly, the production of cash and food crops competed for the limited labour of women and children. In labour peak seasons, women worked for the longest time. As Melab Bukokhe stated,

We used to wake up when the second cocks crowed (about 4.00 a.m) and we would go out to start weeding using moonlight to identify plants from wild weeds. We worked upto two in the afternoon. When we returned home my children (girls) will go to collect water as I prepared food. After we had our meal, we would then go out to do some light work in the farm near home.<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup> Lawrence D. Smith "An Overview of Agricultural Development Policy" in Judith Heyer et. al., Agricultural Development in Kenya: An Economic Assessment, (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1976), p.114.

<sup>42</sup> Melab Bukokhe, Oral interview, Soy Sambu, 3/11/1978. Melab used to work as a casual labourer on settler farms in Trans-Nzoia district.

When discussing their problems, women mentioned specifically the difficulties of obtaining sufficient food for the family and the large amount of farm work, both of which problems related directly to the changes in the pattern of agriculture. The peak labour months were also the "hungry months", that is, the months when most rural family food stores were empty. Consequently, women and children from poor rural households worked as casual labourers to provide food for their families. Payment in this case was mostly in kind: given food. As Sipora Matumbayi stated, "what could one do with money if there was no food to buy? What women needed most was food to feed their children and not money. In fact you gained more when employers accepted to pay in kind because part of the food was used by the family and some of it was sold to get money to buy other items."<sup>43</sup> However Sipora added, "some employers gave very little food as there was no standard measurement, African employers just used their eyes (estimated)."<sup>44</sup> During the "hungry months", women and children had no bargaining power. Their labour was therefore easily exploited by rich peasants.

The income from the sales of cash crops was retained by men. The little income which women acquired from the sales of cash crops was through petty-marketing. This was a highly

---

<sup>43</sup> Sipora Matumbayi, Oral interview, Kibingei, Bungoma, 3/9/1987.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

secretive affair. The cash obtained through the official marketing board was retained by men. According to Audrey C.Smock, "Kenya is an almost classic case of men benefitting disproportionately from new economic opportunities and innovations introduced during the colonial period."<sup>45</sup> In addition, Bernstein observed that, "the organisation of labour and the distribution of use-values and income from the sale of commodities within the household can vary a great deal, for example, notably in the sexual differentiation of labour processes and distribution of the product in terms of sexual categories."<sup>46</sup> Indeed, in Kenya, cash crops and food crops sold for cash belonged to men. While male labour hours dropped dramatically, their income rose significantly. Men owned land, while women and children provided labour. Indeed, as Ken Swindell concluded, "in labour-intensive agriculture, it is the access to and organisation of labour which is often important and, although this may arise in numerous ways, the control over women can be paramount."<sup>47</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup> Audrey C.Smock, "Women's Economic Roles," in Tony Killick (ed.), Papers on the Kenyan Economy: Performance, problems and Policies, (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1981), p.119.

<sup>46</sup> Henry Bernstein, "African Peasantries: A Theoretical Framework" in the Journal of African Peasant Studies, 1979 p.426.

<sup>47</sup> Ken Swindell, Farm Labour, Cambridge University Press, 1985, p.38.

Gender Division of Labour and the Production of Cash Crops

The decade of the 1930s, witnessed dramatic changes in the patterns of work. It was specifically during the gold mining rush and operations in Kakamega of the 1930s that patterns of social change emerged which had profound and permanent effects on women and children's participation in agricultural production. For instance, Heyer emphasized, "although the Abaluhya were the third largest in size, they surpassed other ethnic groups in the supply of labour from 1928 onwards."<sup>48</sup> In addition, Wipper, in particular noted, "the Bukusu comprised the majority of the labour force of the Trans-Nzoia District."<sup>49</sup> Consequently, any increase in agricultural production in the absence of substantial male labour led to the intensification of female and child labour. Because they were the ones who remained in the rural areas while male labour migrated. Male labour migration also altered the gender division of labour, because women took on work responsibilities which were previously performed by men.

Women and children were hired to provide cheap seasonal casual labour on peasant company farms in their neighbourhoods. The use of hired labour by some rural farmers

---

<sup>48</sup> Heyer, "A survey of Agricultural Development in Small Scale Areas of Kenya Since 1920s," Institute of Development Studies, University of Nairobi, Working Paper No.194, 1974, p.11.

<sup>49</sup> A.Wipper, Rural Rebels: A Study of Two Protest Movements in Kenya, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p.96. See also KNA, DC/NN/1/3, AR,1919/1920.

confirms the existence of rural differentiation. On the company farms women and children used to plant, weed, harvest and shell maize in order to cater for the basic subsistence needs which they could no longer satisfy with the limited means of production at the family's disposal. As Shadrack Waswa, a founder member of the Kuywa co-operative society and farming company remarked;

Women and children were some of the best workers. They performed their work well, and therefore finished on time. Men had the tendency of taking up more contracts in different places and did not finish their work on time.<sup>50</sup>

He also added, "women and children used to weed, harvest and shell maize. Men used to plough with a team of oxen and cut maize stalks in preparation for harvesting. Very few men were willing to weed."<sup>51</sup> Thus, the emerging class of indigenous petty capitalist farmers hired labour from neighbouring poor families.<sup>52</sup> Undoubtedly, women and children constituted the majority of hired labour power on company farms.

In Western Province households, the wife's cropped area

---

<sup>50</sup> Shadrack Waswa, Oral Interview, Moi's Bridge, Kitale, 5/1/1988.

<sup>51</sup> Shadrack Waswa, Oral interview, Moi's Bridge, Kitale, 5/1/1988.

<sup>52</sup> The emerging class of capitalist farmers were often referred to as progressive farmers by the colonial agricultural officers. These were by all means men. For example Kitching observed that, "...first, the increasing practice of using ploughs and hiring in the richer households, and the second is an apparent process of withdrawal from agricultural labour on their own land by women in the poorer households." Kitching, Class and Economic Change in Kenya, p.93.

(food crops) declined as the area under cash crops increased. In fact, the decline in food crops in Western Province is closely related to adoption of cash crops which were grown at the expense of food crops. In the northern locations of North Kavirondo, the production of maize was dominated by farming companies, which were strictly male.

The average size of 20 to 30 acres per farm should be seen within the context of the bigger farms which were cultivated by individuals such as chiefs and headmen or by the farmers' clubs or co-operatives (companies). By 1935, 45 ploughing companies operated in the Kimilili region, each ploughing between 20 to 30 acres.<sup>53</sup> Oral evidence however demonstrates that some co-operative companies ploughed more land than official records indicate. For example, in 1935, one company ploughed 225 acres. But, when the company dissolved shortly after 1937, individual members cultivated farms which added up to nearly 500 acres.<sup>54</sup> In 1939, for example, there was another company, "the Yalusi farmers' club of south Kimilili consisted of eleven farmers who together had 600 acres of land under cultivation".<sup>55</sup> Even if one hesitates to call them petty capitalist farmers, the fact that

---

<sup>53</sup> Johnston Khisa, oral interview, Kimilili and Joshua Nabalokha, oral interview, chwele, 23/3/1988. See also Nyanza daily correspondence, Trade and Commerce, Letter from DC, North Kavirondo to Acting Provincial Commissioner, Nyanza Province, 13th, April 1935.

<sup>54</sup> Johnston Khisa, Oral interview, Kimilili,

<sup>55</sup> KNA, DC/NN/1/2, AR, 1939.

they employed wage labour makes it possible for us to assess them on a different scale compared to other small-scale producers. Ken Swindell's observation on differentiation in rural societies is quite appropriate at this point. According to Swindell, "differentiation is about the growing penetration of market relations of production and whether there has occurred a process of differentiation of rural dwellers into a class of capitalist farmers on the one hand, and a poorer class of agricultural labourers on the other hand, with an intermediate class of self-sufficient household producers, who are gradually 'squeezed out' as differentiation proceeds.<sup>56</sup> Thus, the acreage cultivated by the farmers' clubs clearly defined their emerging class position.

#### Modes of transport used in Western Province

Women and children also transported the harvested maize from the farms to the stores and later to the buying centres for sale. The agricultural survey of 1936 demonstrated that in district after district 98% of produce was head-loaded to market.<sup>57</sup> In 1936, a letter from the agricultural officer in Kakamega stated that:

In my opinion, in those areas where distances from places of sale are high, what is wanted to improve trading conditions is not improved transport for the primary producers, but an increased number of

---

<sup>56</sup> Swindell, Farm Labour, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p.57.

<sup>57</sup> KNA, Agr/1/10

places. It is a great waste of time for 20 people to be carrying 60lbs. of head-loads 8 or 10 miles, and it would be preferable for them to carry them say 3 or 4 miles and then for a collector to transport the 1200lbs. in a scotch cart for the remainder of the distance.<sup>58</sup>

Since the agricultural survey had estimated the cost of production and profit on the basis of head-loading it had pre-determined that use of ox-carts and lorries would not significantly increase except for very few wealthy farmers or the 2% noted. The only alternative therefore was to increase the number of marketing stations as suggested above. However some colonial officials continued to dream such as the writer of the annual report of 1941, "the remedy for this uneconomic expenditure of labour in marketing is an increase in the number of ox-carts purchased."<sup>59</sup>

Head-load transport was generally considered a waste of energy. Women and children trekked up to eight to ten miles with produce valued as low as fifty cents per bearer in the case of maize.<sup>60</sup> Maize is bulky, and consequently uneconomical to carry over considerable distances. However, alternative means of transport were too expensive. Lorries, where they were used, like in Kimilili and Kabras locations,

---

<sup>58</sup> KNA, Agr/KSM/1/1016, letter from Agricultural officer, North Kavirondo (Kakamega), to the Provincial Agricultural Officer, Nyanza Province, 1st December 1936.

<sup>59</sup> KNA, North Kavirondo District Annual Report, 1941. See section on Economic survey, p.23.

<sup>60</sup> Elizabeth Schmidt emphasized the fact that women walked. See Schmidt, "Farmers, Hunters and Gold Washers."



were hired from Indians. They were expensive. So the head-load mode of transportation prevailed. Increase in the number of produce buying centres was seen as an alternative solution to help reduce female and child labour wasted by long-distance of head-load transport. In 1938, a survey of markets in the district was made. Consequently, "ten new native markets in the district were gazetted as produce buying centres. There are now 54 produce buying markets in the district".<sup>61</sup> Further, the number of buying licences was increased to 205. The 1938 annual report pointed out that:

... The number of buyers seem unduly high in proportion to the amount of produce offered for sale but it has been difficult to reduce the licences on the grounds that there are already sufficient traders.<sup>62</sup>

All this was done to reduce head load transport, not to provide an alternative mode of transport.

**Male Labour Migration and Its impact on Female and Child labour in Cash Crop Production, 1940-1945.**

All must work. The elderly and retired Europeans have returned to their posts, the elderly native must put his back into it too. Women working on the land are helping to win the war as the men who are fighting.<sup>63</sup>

---

<sup>61</sup> KNA, NKAR, 1938, See also Agr/5/1/203, Agriculture: policy Development of Agriculture in Native Areas.

<sup>62</sup> KNA, Ibid., 1938.

<sup>63</sup> KNA, Agr/Ksm/1/10, War-Time Agricultural Policy and Production, 1939-1943, letter from the Provincial Commissioner, Nyanza to all District Commissioners, Nyanza, 10th February 1941.

By 1940, male labour migration was firmly established as a permanent feature in Kenya. In addition, the outbreak of World War II further increased the demand for male labour. Rural areas were almost totally depleted of able-bodied male labour. Even male child labour migration was encouraged. At the same time, the colonial state, through the Department of Agriculture, urged rural indigenous communities to step up the production of foodstuffs and cash crops. Such encouragement by the colonial government led to a substantial increase in the production of foodstuffs during the war. This was to ensure the continuous supply of food in the rural areas and to contribute towards the food requirements of the soldiers who were fighting, particularly in the Middle East.<sup>64</sup> But, in the absence of male labour, how was agricultural production in the rural areas maintained? Who contributed the labour needed for agricultural production in Western Province? The demand for male labour reached its peak during the war period. Consequently, rural areas, especially Western Province was completely drained of able-bodied male labour. This had severe implications for women and children who remained in the rural areas. The war-time labour policy was simple and clear, "all must work", and in rural areas, this meant more labour for women and children. In Kenya, the exploitation and marginalisation of women greatly intensified during the World

---

<sup>64</sup> Lawrence D. Smith, "An Overview of Agricultural Development Policy" in Judith Heyer et. al., Agricultural Development in Kenya, (Nairobi: O.U.P, 1967), p.122.

War II period. Available evidence suggests that during the war, women bore the burden of peasant production more than before, mainly due to massive male labour migration from the reserves. Female and child labour bore the brunt of both food and cash crop production in rural areas.

Table 7

Nyanza Labour in Employment in 1945

	Luo (C. & S.N)	Kisii	Luhya (N.Nyanza)	Total
Population	620,000	155,000	455,000	1,230,000
Tot. Male	303,800	75,950	222,950	602,700
M.16-45	115,320	28,829	89,180	233,329
Male E.	43,890	9,632	50,701	104,223
Con.1943	3,772	850	1,784	6,406
Con.1944	8,638	2,153	4,684	15,475

Source: KNA, PC/NZA/3/13/13, Special Labour census, 1945.  
M: male, Con: Conscripted, E: Employment and Tol: Total.

Table 7 indicates the number of working age of males (ages 16 to 45) who were absent from the Western Province in 1945. There had been a significant increase in 1943 and by 1945 just over half of the working males had been drawn off the land. This average ran from a high of 62% of the Abaluhya men to a low of 41% among the Kisii. Male labour recruited from the Western Province was reported in 1945 to have been "the highest tribal (sic) total in the colony." The importance to the settler economy was clear from the 1943 memo from the Commissioner of Labour. In 1943, the Commissioner of Labour for example stated:

Nyanza natives (Luhya, Luo and Kisii) supply most of the sisal labour about 72%. In coffee, the Kikuyu head the list with just under 50%. Tea, of

course shows mainly Nyanza natives, about 77%, while stock, dairy and agriculture have more 'other Kenya Tribes' as was to be expected, seeing that Nandi, Lumbwa (Kipisigis) as well as Maasai are included under this head. Their proportion is just over 35%.<sup>65</sup>

Some colonial officials expected reduction in rural agricultural production, especially in Western Province because of man-power shortage. Such fears were expressed by Nyanza Agricultural Officers. In a meeting held in Nyanza, they argued:

We are worried at the rate at which recruiting for both military and civil needs are proceeding. We do not say that saturation point has been reached but there is little doubt that in the not too distant future a stage will be reached when it will be extremely difficult to keep up our present rate of production if the reserve is being denuded of the able-bodied men.<sup>66</sup>

In the absence of male labour, rural agricultural production was expected to decline. Surprisingly, it increased. In Kenya, the provinces which contributed the highest number of able-bodied male labourers were simultaneously the most productive provinces in the colony. Indeed, Western Province (North Kavirondo, which belonged to old Nyanza Province administratively) was one of them. Emphasising the important

---

<sup>65</sup> KNA, PC/NZA/3/13/15, 1941-1949, Memo on special labour census from the Labour Commissioner, Nairobi February 1st, 1943.

<sup>66</sup> KNA, Agr/KSM/1/10, letter from Senior Agricultural Officer, Nyanza to the Director of Agriculture, Nairobi, 8th August, 1942. The Nyanza agricultural officers aptly stated that, "things are difficult in our big producing locations on the Uganda border where people see the inhabitants of a neighbouring country who are neither conscripted or asked to increase production."

contributions made by Nyanza Province, the East African Standard editorialized:

Nyanza Province is, probably one of the most fertile and closely farmed native areas in the colony and here the African producer is growing maize, rice, mtama and wimbi (millet and sorghum), groundnuts, cotton, rye and simsim for export.<sup>67</sup>

This underscores the twin significance of Nyanza Province. On the one hand, Nyanza contributed the highest male labour in the colony and on the other hand, it was equally important in the production of food and cash crops. This agricultural production was accomplished and sustained through the active participation of women and children.

Colonial government officials had different views on the question of male labour depletion from the reserves. Some were concerned about the implications that continued male labour recruitment would have on food and cash crop production in rural areas. One Senior Agricultural Officer observed:

It is obvious that the country in the last few years has come more and more to rely on Nyanza maize and any diminution in the quantity might have serious consequences... The position of food supplies of the rest crop variety in the reserves is in most places good, but if a large percentage of the available man power is taken, I do not see how the woman power and the remaining man power would keep up both the supplies of food for sale and rest crops for their own use in case of a cereal crop failure. In the case of the Kitosh it is doubtful if a man can produce as much outside the reserve as he can inside.<sup>68</sup>

---

<sup>67</sup> The East African Standard, May 23rd, 1942.

<sup>68</sup> KNA, Agr/Ksm/1/10, letter from Senior Agricultural Officer Nyanza to the Director of Agriculture, Nairobi, August 8th, 1942.

He gave examples to illustrate how male recruitment had affected cash crop production in Western Province, pointing out:

Already in Maragoli-Tiriki-Bunyore the women are holding big stores of maize that we want marketed because their male helpers have been taken and they cannot plant such a big shamba next year, or for that matter this short rains. In the Kisii highlands there has been practically no cultivation for short rains. The Agricultural Officer North Nyanza reports that harvesting in Kitosh in some places is going to be difficult because of lack of man-power.<sup>69</sup>

The women's refusal to market maize was a form of passive resistance to the colonial government's continued withdrawal of male labour from rural areas. The women hoped that their refusal would force the government to return their husbands. Some women did male jobs under duress, but it seems that women did not take this opportunity to challenge male control over the sale of cash crops.

The Nyanza Provincial Commissioner believed, "it is the indirect, rather than the direct results of conscription which we have to fear".<sup>70</sup> Moreover, he added:

The women let their husbands go cheerfully enough to war and even to help the civil war effort, but they did not expect them to go so long. Staleness and despondency may supervene and the Administrative Officers are so busy with recruiting and other war work that they have no time for

---

<sup>69</sup> KNA, Agr/Ksm/1/10, letter from Senior Agricultural Officer, Nyanza, to the Director of Agriculture, Nairobi, 12th October, 1942.

<sup>70</sup> KNA, Agr/Ksm/1/10, letter from Provincial Commissioner, Nyanza, to the Director of Agriculture, Nairobi, 13th October 1942.

leisurely conversation which would help to explain the position. I think that what the Senior Agricultural Officer has mainly noticed is flagging of energy among the women. Partly this is because they are despondent of having their men away, and partly it is because there is very little in the shops on which to spend their money and remittances suffice.<sup>71</sup>

While the Provincial Commissioner recognised the need to explain to the women the prolonged absence of their men from home, at the same time, he did not think that the problem demanded immediate attention. Not surprisingly, he believed, 'leisurely conversation' would solve the problem. This was a part of the patriarchal attitudes so common among colonial administrative officers, who did not take women's concerns seriously. The Provincial Commissioner proposed a series of barazas (public meetings) along with talks to Africans in their villages and farms whenever time permitted.<sup>72</sup> This was a male oriented solution because words like barazas appealed to men and not women. Barazas are public meetings and because of the dominant male patriarchal norms, these meetings were not attended by women and girls. Only men and mature boys attended.

The Nyanza Provincial Commissioner also tried to limit male migration, explaining, "the point may perhaps be best appreciated if I put it this way: a Nyanza light labourer is

---

<sup>71</sup> KNA, Agr/Ksm/1/10, letter from the Provincial Commissioner's Office, Nyanza Province to the Director of Agriculture, Nairobi, 13th October 1943.

<sup>72</sup> KNA, Agr/Ksm/1/10, Note the careful choice of words that the provincial commissioner used.

capable of producing in his own Reserve six bags of maize over and above what he eats. If he is sent out as a sisal conscript he not only produces no food but he eats four bags of posho (maize meal) which we generally have to supply from Nyanza. Consequently, every labourer supplied from Nyanza to sisal reduces our potential by ten bags of maize. We are at present sending 915 men to sisal every month".<sup>73</sup> Male labour migration from Nyanza Province was uneconomical, less productive outside the reserve and was too expensive to maintain. Hence, the Provincial Commissioner noted that:

I am sure you recognise our willingness to do all we can but it would be foolish if we did not forewarn you that we have reached a point when no more men ought to leave the Reserve unless we are reasonably certain in each case that the man will do more essential work where he is going than he would by remaining behind and cultivating. It is a point not to be neglected that, if the men in the Reserve become depleted beyond a certain point, the women get despirited and do not work with a will.<sup>74</sup>

This was written in 1942 before the great leap in the numbers of males leaving the land. The exodus would grow until by 1945 half of all working age men had gone. Few statements reveal more clearly than those above, the male assumptions and chauvinism of European colonial men. Even a casual visitor to the Western Province could see that women performed the farm labour. The European male officials knew it too from observation and from their own statistics. It was a case of

---

<sup>73</sup> KNA, Lab/3/111, letter from the Provincial Commissioner, Nyanza, to the Honorable Chief Secretary, October 26th, 1942.

<sup>74</sup> KNA, Ibid., Lab/3/111.



gender assumptions so deeply ingrained that it overrode what the eyes and ears were reporting. It explains why colonial officials continued to teach agriculture to men, why their example has been followed in independent Kenya and by the World Bank. The gender assumption apparently became interwoven with a capitalist ideology that production was dependent upon male managers directing and possibly compelling female labour.

Quite contrary to European male assumptions about the massive withdrawal of African male labour, production increased as never before. The increases in fact were astonishing so that it might be argued that African males had formed some kind of drag on production such that their withdrawal liberated women to organise more efficiently than had been possible under male management. Tables 8 (I-III) have been organised specifically to show the leap in production after 1943 when African males were leaving the rural areas at twice the earlier rate and by 1945 when production was at its highest and 50% of working age males were absent. Once the males had left, maize sales rose 63% in 1944 and maintained that level in 1945 despite the price dropping by almost 50%. Cotton production rose by 30% in 1944 and another 28% in 1945 despite lower prices. Thus maize sales increased 63% and cotton 58% when to judge by the forbodings of European male officials there should have been a collapse of production since the men were gone.

Probably even more significant is the statistics for paddy rice, a new crop which had insignificant production before 1942. In 1943 sales rose 82% and in 1944, 40% a figure maintained in 1945. Consequently it appeared that with half of the African males gone, women could innovate, learn new cultivation techniques and expand production 122% over two years. It should also be noted that tables 8 (I-III) represent only what indigenous communities marketed through

Table 8 (I)

Maize Production: Western Kenya, 1939-1945.

Years	Quantity (Bags)	Price per bag (Shs.)	Total Value (£)
1939-1943	240,337 (Av.)	5.00	59,554 (av.)
1944	646,924	7.80	252,968
1945	640,550	8.11	259,688

Table 8 (II)

Cotton Production: Western Province, 1939-1945.

Years	Quantity (Ib.)	Price per Ib. (Cts.)	Total Value (£)
1939-1943	4,410,195 (av.)	9.6 cts	21,266 (av.)
1944	6,306,532	12.97 cts	40,870
1945	8,775,207	11.07 cts	48,605

Table 8 (III)

Paddy Rice Production: Western Province, 1939-1945

Years	Quantity (bags)	Price per bag	Total Value (£)
-------	-----------------	---------------	-----------------

1939-1940	432 (av.)	8.4 (shs.)	182 (av.)
1941-1942	2,891 (av.)	10.00 (shs)	1,446 (av.)
1943	15,719	19.00 (shs)	11,004
1944	26,259	12.00 (shs.)	15,755
1945	25,608	12.80 (shs.)	16,389

Source: Compiled from KNA, PC/NZA/3/2/30, Agriculture, Crop Production: Specific Crop, Maize, 1940-1944, North Kavirondo Annual Reports, 1934-1945, and Agr/KSM/1/10, War-time Agricultural Policy and Production, 1939-1943.

the official channels such as the Kenya Farmers Association (K.F.A) and not what was consumed by individual households or sold through the unofficial channels like the black market (magendo). Nothing demonstrated so clearly the capabilities of women as the dramatic- almost spectacular rise of production during the war years when the male labour force had been cut by half.

In looking back at the "fictitious" farm in table 2 which had just launched into cash crops in the late 1930's we see that the males worked 672 hours, the women 2135 hours and the children 635 hours. Unhappily we have no time-budget studies for the war years especially after "the great leap forward" in 1943-1945. It seems reasonable to suppose as a guessimate that women's hours of labour in agricultural work passed considerably over the 3,000 -hour average for South East Asian men, that children's labour increased and that the males left behind at least increased their hours from 672 to 1,000 which was the African average. Undoubtedly ploughing became much

more extensive not only for cotton but probably for all crops. Prices improved during the war which would permit more ploughing. More markets probably reduced the miles of load-heading and better prices may have permitted the hiring of more labour-saving transport. As a very rough indicator the two major crops, maize and cotton, together rose about 60% on average during the 1943-1945 period. Supposing that labour rose proportionately, then males would have worked 1075 hours, women 3,416 and children 1016. No one has ever sought to calculate the hours women spent on domestic chores. Supposing that they spent four hours per day. Their total labour year would equal 4,876 hours which calculates at 13.30 hours per day every day of the year. Clearly women were the heroes of war time and cash and food crop production in the Western Province of Kenya.

Diversification of Cash Crop Production and Labour in  
Western Province, 1946-1985

The end of the war witnessed the expansion and diversification of cash crop production among peasant cultivators in Kenya. Peasant cultivators were allowed to grow cash crops such as coffee, which had been previously reserved for white settler farmers. This demanded more labour, especially from women and children. In addition, the growing social differentiation in rural areas imposed extra responsibilities on women and children from poor households

who were hit hardest, while women and children from rich families experienced less labour demands. The ability to hire extra labour during the peak labour seasons was crucial, and only more affluent households could do this. The combination of male labour migration and cash crop diversification imposed heavy labour burdens on women and children in Western Province. Table 9 analyses the gender division of labour in Western Province for the period starting from 1950.

Table 9

Division of Labour and Production of Cash Crops, 1950-1985.

Crop	Men*	Women and Children	Men, women and children
Cotton	Farm preparation, spraying with pesticides and marketing in bulk	Hand digging, weeding, sorting (separating good fibres from bad fibres) petty marketing	Planting, picking and transporting to markets
Maize	purchase of farm implements, ploughing, weeding with plough, construction of stores, repair of farm implements and bulk marketing	Weeding, actual storing and petty marketing	Planting and harvesting

Coffee after 1951	Land Preparation, digging holes, purchasing seedlings, planting, pruning, spraying with pesticides, marketing through the co-operatives	Filling holes with animal manure, continuous weeding, picking of coffee berries, sorting out ' <u>mbuni</u> ' from good berries, drying ' <u>mbuni</u> ' in the sun and continuous manuring, mulching and terracing	Transportation of coffee berries to the factory
Peanuts	-	Preparation of land, planting, harvesting, shelling and selling (this was normally grown on small scale in the 1950's)	-
Onions	Preparation of seed beds in large scale farming, (in large scale farming hired labour was used)	Preparation of seed beds (small scale farming), planting, weeding, harvesting and drying	Planting and Carrying to markets
Sugar cane after 1968	Planting	Planting, continuous weeding, and manuring	-
Tobacco after 1975	Preparation of land and seed beds, bulk marketing through B.A.T stores, collecting firewood for curing tobacco leaves	Preparation of seed beds, care of young seedlings, grading tobacco leaves and transportation to B.A.T stores	Transplanting and removing suckers, harvesting, drying tobacco leaves

Beans	Preparation of land and bulk marketing	Planting, weeding, harvesting, sorting, storing and petty marketing	Carrying to markets
Vegetables Cabbages and <u>sukuma</u> <u>wiki</u>	Making of seed beds	Preparation of land, seed beds and transplanting, weeding, plucking for use and sale	-

Source: Culled from a variety of oral interviews in Western Province. \* Most labour performed by men had by the 1950's been replaced, almost 75% by hired labour (ploughing teams) and by the 1960's, tractors were already in use. (Oral interview, Johnston Khisa, a retired agricultural extension officer).

Several observations can be made from the above. First, women's work in agriculture continued to surpass that of men. While men continued to dominate land preparation and cattle

care, women and girls did most of the remaining work in planting, weeding and harvesting of both food and cash crops. During the seasons of long and short rains, the distinctive work roles of men and women were evident as it is shown in table 10.

During the peak labour seasons, women were usually expected to work on their husband's cash crop farms as well as the family's food crop farms. Although children helped with the latter, the expansion of cash crop production increased women's labour. Coffee was introduced in Western Province in 1950 and the first cooperative society was created at Chwele

Table 10

Agricultural Cycle: Work Pattern After 1950

Month	Jan-Feb.	Mar/Ap/May	June-August	Sep-Dec
Weather	Hot/Dry	Long Rains	Short Rains*	
Crop:				
Cotton	prepare fields, sorting out and marketing	-	Planting, weeding, spraying with pesticides	Main harvest
Maize (The eight month variety before the introduction of hybrid varieties)	Preparation of land	Planting, weeding and manuring	Weeding	Harvesting



Coffee	Preparation of land, digging holes for planting, filling holes with animal manure, pruning and mulching	Planting, continuous weeding, spraying with pesticides	Planting, thinning continuous weeding, plucking coffee berries	Plucking coffee berries, manuring, putting wind-breaks and shade
Potatoes	-	Preparation of land, tubers planting	Weeding	Tubers planting
Bananas	-	Pruning, mulching, continuous weeding, removing suckers and planting	Continuous weeding	Suckers pruning and mulching
Cassava	-	Continuous weeding, harvesting	Preparation of land and planting, harvesting	Weeding, pruning
Sorghum	Preparation of land, planting	Weeding	Harvest, retoune crop	Preparation of land
Eleusine	Preparation of land and planting	Weeding	Making of stores and harvesting	

Source: Culled from various Oral interviews in Western Province, 1987-1988. \* Short rains lasted from August to October.

in 1953. In 1950, the Department of Agriculture Annual Report noted:

A nursery was sown sufficient for planting 200 acres. Growth was so good that it was decided to

plant out approximately 100 acres in 1951, to leave in the nursery seedlings for 100 acres of plantation in 1952 and to establish a new nursery at the end of 1951 for 1953 transplantings. The first plantations (between 300 and 400 in number) will be on the grey volcanic Elgon soil near Chwele and within a radius of 3 miles from the site of the first pulping station just below one of the new dams.<sup>75</sup>

Hence, in 1954, the Department of Agriculture Annual Report observed, "in the Kimilili area the first coffee factory has started operating and has greatly stimulated interest in coffee planting. The factory at Chwele is expected to produce a crop of about 15 tons of parchment this season."<sup>76</sup> Coffee growing in African areas was closely supervised by members of the Department of Agriculture. As a result, high standards of cultivation and processing were maintained. Africans produced good yields of high quality coffee as table 11 suggests.

---

<sup>75</sup> KNA, Department of Agriculture, Annual Report, 1950 Vol.II, Government Printer, Nairobi, 1951, p.2.

<sup>76</sup> KNA, Department of Agriculture, Annual Report 1954, (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1955), p.20. Similarly, the report noted that, "coffee growing by Africans continued to expand. The number of licensed African coffee growers increased from 15,019 in 1953 to 18,806 in 1954. The corresponding increase in acreage is from 3,867 acres in 1953 to 5,339 acres in 1954 of which 1,084 acres are estimated to be in bearing. Almost exactly half the growers and half the acreage are in the Meru District of the Central Province. There are smaller areas in the Embu, Nyeri and Fort Hall Districts of the Central Province and at Kisii and Kimilili in the Nyanza Province. For details, see pp.19-20.

Table 11

Quality and Value of European Vs African Produced Coffee,  
1950-1955

Year	European Grown Coffee in Tons	Average Payout Per cwt.		African Grown Coffee Tons	Average payout per cwt.	
		Shs.	cts.		Shs.	cts.
1950/51	9,642.40	374	09	85.15	393	51
1951/52	15,891.53	416	59	84.14	425	47
1952/53	11,908.10	435	77	180.23	456	89
1953/54	10,885.68	509	00	338.33	568	87
1954/55	11,849.10	373	27	749.73	378	62

Source: Department of Agriculture, Annual Report, 1955.

The quality of African produced coffee was excellent. It fetched more money on the local and international market than that grown by Europeans. Profits inspired more production during the 1950s. The 1955 Agricultural Annual Report stated:

the coffee acreage in Nyanza Province is expanding rapidly in both Kisii and Kimilili (emphasis added) and while plantings are still in the trial stage in Central Nyanza it is intended to make the first commercial plantings in Kericho in 1956. The factory at Kimilili turned out high quality coffee a sample of which won the coffee cup at the Western Kenya show.<sup>77</sup>

Similarly, the 1956 agricultural Annual Report for instance noted that:

The coffee crop in Nyanza grown by Africans amounts to 2,850 acres. The quality of the 1955/1956 crop was better than had been expected, climatic conditions being responsible for a soft bean. The classification was: South Nyanza... 41.42 per cent in the first three classes, Elgon Nyanza... 54.64 per cent in first three classes. There is in

---

<sup>77</sup> KNA, Department of Agriculture, Annual Report, 1955, Government Printer, Nairobi, 1956, p. 12.

general a steady improvement in grade.<sup>78</sup>

The following quantity of coffee was exported from Western Province from 1956-1960.

The diversification and increased production of cash crops by Africans also led to the intensification of female and child labour in rural areas. Cash crops like coffee were particularly labour intensive, especially high quality production. As a result, coffee production imposed heavy demands on female and child labour, particularly during harvest and weeding seasons since women and children were good at picking coffee berries. Consequently, increased coffee production meant increased labour for women and children.

Table 12

Coffee Exported from Western Province, 1956-1960

<u>Year</u>	<u>Quantity Exported in Tons</u>		<u>Cash Return in Pounds</u>
1956	Coffee Clean	41 Tons	£ 34,899
	Coffee 'Mbuni'	46 "	£ 6,275
1957	Coffee Clean	60 "	£ 41,538
	Coffee 'Mbuni'	40 "	£ 5,163
1958	Coffee Clean	100 "	£ 41,538
	Coffee 'Mbuni'	40 "	£ 5,168
1959	Coffee Clean	148 "	£ 59,201
	Coffee 'Mbuni'	37 "	£ 3,476
1960	Coffee Clean	282 "	£111,623
	Coffee 'Mbuni'	141 "	£ 12,409

Source: KNA, District Annual Reports and Ministry of Agriculture deposits, 1950-1961.

<sup>78</sup> KNA, Department of Agriculture, Annual Report 1956, Government Printer, Nairobi, 1957, p.18.

Coffee production expanded even more rapidly in the post independence period. In 1959, a total of 2,190 acres of land was planted with coffee and there were 8,525 arabica coffee growers and 375 robusta growers. The acreage increased to 2,573 in 1960 and to 5,214 in 1967. Similarly, the number of growers increased from 10,049 in 1960 to 13,843 in 1967. Table 13 provides coffee production figures and value to the producers in Western Province for the period 1961 to 1967.

Table 13

Coffee Production in Western Province, 1961-1967

<u>Year</u>	<u>Quantity Exported in Tons</u>		<u>Cash in Pounds</u>
1961	Coffee Clean	282 Tons	£101,588
	Coffee 'Mbuni'	110 "	
1963	Coffee Clean	608 "	£151,858
	Coffee 'Mbuni'	36 "	
1965	Coffee Clean	345.54 "	£133,226
	Coffee 'Mbuni'	.89 "	
1966	Coffee Clean	433 "	£127,581
	Coffee 'Mbuni'	7 "	
1967	Coffee Clean	484.81 "	£118,811
	Coffee 'Mbuni'	1 "	

Source: KNA, Dept. of Agriculture, Annual Reports from 1959-1968.

By 1969, 2,111 hectares of land were planted with coffee in Bungoma District. This had increased to 2,400 hectares by 1979. Tables 14 and 15 provide additional data on cash crop production and expansion in Western Province, 1969-1983. Expansion in the area under production also meant an increase in the labour supply which was provided by women and children.

There was similar expansion in the acreage under production for other cash crops. Table 15 provides additional information on the area under cash crops in Bungoma District.

Table 14

Crop Areas for 1969 and 1979 in Bungoma

Crop	Estimated		% Change
	1969 (1)	1979 (2)	
Industrial Crops	7,083	17,356	+145.0%
Coffee	2,111	2,400	+13.6%
Cotton	4,632	5,000	+7.9%
Sugar Cane	114	8,000	+6917.5%
Sunflower	215	300	+39.9%
Tobacco	Nil	250	-
Pyrethrum	11	800	-
Sisal	-	200	-
Tea	-	6	-

Note: (1) These figures are extracted from the Statistical Abstract, 1977. (2), The figures are derived from the District Data Sheet, (Ministry of Agriculture). For details on production in Bungoma District, see Bungoma District Development Plan, 1979-1983, p. 26.

Table 15 shows that there has been an increase in the area under cash crops. Similarly, new cash crops such as tobacco, sugar cane and pyrethrem had been introduced in the province. In 1983, there were 15,069 hectares under sugar cane. Other cash crops include tobacco which is also a labour intensive cash crop. In all these production processes, women and

children continued to play a significant role, providing labour while rarely controlling the profits of their labour. Unfortunately no time budgets were available for these new crops.

Table 15

Coffee Production in Western Province, 1979-1983

Year	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
No. of ha.	2988.2	3188.2	3232.1	3272.1	3322.1
No. of Tons of cherry	32870	35070	35553	37629	38204

Cotton Production in Western Province, 1979-1983

Year	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
No. of ha.	7190	8450	9000	9500	10,000
Tons	2876	4225	5400	7600	10,000

Source: Republic of Kenya, Bungoma District Development Plan, 1979-1983, (Nairobi, Government Printer, 1978), p. 33.<sup>79</sup>.

Conclusion

During the colonial period in Kenya, the introduction and expansion of peasant cash crop production led to the intensification of female and child labour in rural

---

<sup>79</sup> The 1979-1983 Bungoma District Development Plan, added, the District "will contribute to coffee production by increasing its coffee hectarage from the current 2,600 ha. to 3,300 ha. by 1983." For additional information, see ROK, Bungoma District Development Plan, 1979-1983, (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1978), p.32.

agricultural production. The situation was made worse for women in particular as well as female children as a result of continued male labour withdrawal from the rural areas to settler estates and later, the demands of the war. Increased cash crop production, despite significant male migration, supports this conclusion. In addition, the diversification of cash crop production notable in the 1950s onwards contributed in significant ways to increase female and child labour.

Similarly, the lack of improved and appropriate technology also contributed to women and children's labour in agricultural production. The hoe dominated activities which involved weeding, making peasant agricultural production extremely labour intensive. In addition, the seasonality of labour demands created labour bottle-necks which women and children had to cope with. In the absence of appropriate technology to alleviate their labour burdens women and children were especially over-worked during the peak-labour seasons.

The time-budgets provided in this chapter demonstrate the importance of female and to some less degree child labour in sustaining rural cash crop production. But, because of the colonial state and settler's desire to make maximum profits, African cash crops were under-valued [received low prices on the local market]. The colonial state and settlers rationalized these prices by arguing that, peasant cash crops were produced with unpaid female and child labour. In this



way, the exploitation of female and child labour at the household level reverberated and affected men as well.

In this chapter we have argued that while women and children's labour was crucial for rural peasant cash crop production, however, cash crops belonged to men. This was a result of the alliance between the European and African patriarchal traditions. This oppressive appropriation of women and children's labour and the products of that labour was strengthened by changes in the land tenure system which eliminated women's use rights in land.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Colonial Labour Policy and Legislation in Kenya: Its Impact on Women and Children's Labour, 1902-1963.

Previous chapters have tried to create an evolving picture, over time, of the changes in the amount and divisions of labour among women and children in Western Province from pre-colonial times into the twentieth century. Obviously this labour was performed under the framework of, and affected by, the fact that Kenya became a territory under British colonial rule. To what extent was the labour of these women and children affected by a labour "policy" of the colonial state, and by its laws and ordinances?

The answer to this question is by no means simple. For the colonial state was a complex and often contradictory mechanism, pulled this way and that by forces it could not necessarily control. Kenya had been acquired by Britain in the 1890s primarily for strategic reasons to obtain access to Uganda and the sources of the Nile. For this purpose the expensive and unprofitable railway had been built. In a desperate attempt to make the railway viable the early colonial government had invited white settlers into the "White Highlands" area. The implication was that these settlers would have to be provided with land and cheap labour. Yet in fact there was no "surplus" of labour. Africans were enmeshed in their own largely self-sufficient economy and work for

wages had no particular appeal to them. To make white settlement profitable, the colonial state had to ensure a labour supply both for white farmers and for the infrastructure of roads and public works if the colony was to pay for itself. For the latter, coercion and compulsory labour was used, on the argument that communal labour for public purposes had been part of pre-colonial economic life. To provide labour for settlers, forms of administrative pressure, often virtually tantamount to coercion, were used to create wage labour. As will be seen, both forms of pressure, directed ostensibly only to African adult males, actually resulted in the intensification of demands on women and children to work longer and harder.

At the same time, however, the colonial state in Kenya was not an autonomous body. It was responsible to the Colonial Office in London, which in turn answered to the British parliament and public opinion. Before 1938 the Colonial Secretaries and their officials did not conceive it their duty to "make policy" in a colony; that was the task of the governor and his colonial service officials. Nevertheless important lobbies in Britain could exert considerable pressure, especially through members of parliament, the press, the churches, opposition parties and even the Trade Union Congress. As the settler economy expanded in Kenya all of these groups became more and more critical of Kenya's labour policies. After 1919 their interventions in press and

parliament became increasingly embarrassing to the Colonial Office, both domestically and by virtue of Britain's treaty obligations to the International Labour Organisation. Critics at first concentrated on abuse and coercion of male labour, but increasingly after 1920 the matter of women's and children's labour became a focus of attention. In response, the Colonial Office forced a somewhat reluctant Kenya to introduce legislation attempting to control abuses. Whether this legislation was at all effective is a matter that will require examination.

While the labour of women and children became an increasing concern of critics in Britain, it cannot be argued that such attention was the result of a growing "feminist" perspective. On the contrary those advocating protective legislation for women and children did so from a traditional male and Christian perspective. The tone was set by missionary critics, who were the best informed about actual conditions because of their presence in Kenya, and could feed this information to the press in Britain and to their church authorities and political allies. The missionaries were not concerned with "liberating" women from patriarchal authority; on the contrary they envisaged the exploitation of both women's and children's labour and the migrant labour of men as dire threats to patriarchal social discipline. The "family" was in danger and women's and children's labour, especially at distance from the home, threatened the breakdown of

traditional discipline over both women and children. The effects of such labour on sexual morality, the spread of prostitution, abuse of alcohol and the disobedience of children were frequently stressed. In contrast the ideal was pictured in traditional Victorian British terms; wives should stay at home, obedient to their husbands, nurturing disciplined children.

Unpaid Forced Female and Child Labour in Western Province,  
1902-1939.

In Kenya, colonial labour policy consisted of a series of ordinances and labour circulars. Before 1918 these ordinances aimed at controlling male labour. The 1906 Master and Servants Ordinance and its 1910 revision made a provision for apprenticeship.<sup>1</sup> The 1910 Roads in Native Reserves Ordinance, and the 1912 Native Authority Ordinance specifically referred to "able-bodied adult males above 18 years and below 45 years."<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> The Master and Servants Ordinance, Ord.8 of 1906, East Africa Protectorate (E.A.P), Gazette, 15 April 1906. The 1910 Master and Servants Ordinance, Ord.4 of 1910, E.A.P, Gazette, 1st April 1910.

<sup>2</sup> In 1910 compulsory labour on roads or other works in lieu of a communal fine for offences such as harbouring criminals was permitted; this same year witnessed the passing of the Roads in Native Reserves Ordinance which approved six days of labour per quarter to be provided by men of an area. For details, see the Roads in Native Reserves Ordinance, Ord. 12 of 1910, E.A.P. Gazette, 1 May 1910. In 1912, the Native Authority Ordinance extended the purposes for which men could

Chiefs and headmen who carried out much of the daily administration in the rural areas were armed by the colonial government with certain powers in respect to communal labour. Under the Village Headmen Ordinance of 1902, for example, headmen could be directed to keep any public roads in repair, and, if necessary, to raise communal fines.<sup>3</sup> While these powers were ostensibly granted to control adult male labour, women and children often turned up to work on communal projects, especially road construction, instead of their husbands and fathers. According to oral evidence, women and children assisted their husbands and fathers in the actual digging up of these roads. They also cleaned them out periodically. After roads were dug up, women, with assistance from children, would level them while men cut long trees for constructing bridges. In one region (Sirisia in Bungoma), a woman, Mutenyo Wamakhanya, was employed by the chief to supervise other women in road construction. Furthermore, women kept the roads clean and properly maintained by smearing

---

be called out to work for six days a quarter to communal projects. For a more insightful explanation, see the Native Authority Ordinance, Ord 22 of 1912, E.A.P., 1 Nov 1912. And as Clayton and Savage adds, "some more ambitious officials trying to develop an area began to require men to leave their homes for communal labour, on occasions not observing the legal limit of six days per quarter." Government and Labour, p.44.

<sup>3</sup> The Village Ordinance, Ord 22 of 1902, E.A.P. Gazette, 7th Nov 1902. Men who failed to supply communal labour as per the headman's orders were convicted for a breach of the Village Headmen Ordinance.

the roads with cow-dung in the same way as they smeared their houses.<sup>4</sup>

In fact, colonial chiefs were the major appropriators of women's and children's labour power in the rural areas. The chief's orders had to be obeyed by everybody, including women and children. Colonial chiefs and headmen used their new authority to obtain labour for their own farms. In 1925, for example, Chief Murunga was reported to the District Commissioner at Kakamega for forcing women to dig up roads and to work on his personal farms. In a meeting held at Malakisi, the Bukusu elders resolved to send Maruti Malemo to Kakamega to report Murunga to the District Commissioner. Maruti took two types of wild fruits to Kakamega, (Busangura and Chifutu) to show the District Commissioner as samples of what people ate, including young children. Maruti told the District Commissioner that people were starving and were about to die because Murunga had forced women to stop working in their gardens.<sup>5</sup> As a result of this report the District Commissioner ruled that women should henceforth be exempted

---

<sup>4</sup> Musa Wanyonyi, Oral Interview, Sirisia, (Bungoma), 14/2/1988. For easy maintenance of roads, they were divided into small portions and each adult male was allocated a portion which was cleaned weekly by his wife (wives) and children. See also Van Zwanenberg, Colonial Capitalism and Labour, p.125.

<sup>5</sup> Murunga was a colonial chief. He was appointed by the colonial government and ruled in the present Bungoma District. Murunga came from the Wanga sub-ethnic group of the Abaluhya ethnic group and was chief among the Bukusu, another sub-ethnic group of the Abaluhya community.

from road construction and working on Murunga's personal farms.<sup>6</sup> However, many chiefs continued to exploit female and child labour.

When settlers arrived in Kenya in 1904, they quickly sought to utilize the 1902 Village Headmen Ordinance. The settlers viewed chiefs and headmen as key allies for labour recruitment and discipline. By 1906 settlers working through colonial-appointed chiefs and headmen, were busily engaged in labour recruitment. Professional labour recruitment agents dealt directly with chiefs and headmen to acquire the needed workers. Initially, only male labour was recruited, ostensibly because they needed cash for paying taxes. Colonial capitalism encouraged male migrant labour. As a result, men dominated wage labour, while women and children constituted the majority of the communal rural labour force which chiefs and headmen exploited under the Village Headmen Ordinance.<sup>7</sup>

In order to obtain labour, chiefs and headmen often resorted to force. Forced or compulsory labour was widely used during the first decades of colonial rule in Kenya.

---

<sup>6</sup> Jeremial Kukubo, Oral Interview, Bungoma, 2/10/1987. Kukubo worked as a colonial chief in the present Bungoma district.

<sup>7</sup> For example Anthony Clayton and Donald C. Savage observed that "some chiefs were apparently using powers to order communal labour for their own purposes, others possessed unnecessarily large numbers of retainers." For details see A. Clayton and D.C. Savage, Government and Labour in Kenya, 1985-1963, (London: Frank Cass, 1974), pp.56-60.



There were two laws under which administrative officers, European or African, could force indigenous communities to work for public purposes. There was the 1910 Roads in Native Reserves Ordinance, which empowered colonial officers to call upon able-bodied men to do six days of unpaid work per quarter (three months) on the roads of their area. The other law was the 1912 Native Authority Ordinance, under which able-bodied men were required to work without pay for a similar amount of time on public works for the benefit of the community. Communal labour was called under section 8 (h) of the 1912 Native Authority Ordinance which stated:

8. Any head-man may from time to time issue orders to be obeyed by natives residing within the local limits of his jurisdiction for any of the purposes following: ... (h) requiring able-bodied men to work in the making or maintaining of any water-course or other work constructed or to be constructed or maintained for the benefit of the community to which such able-bodied men belong:- provided that no person shall be ordered or required to work as aforesaid for more than six days in any quarter.<sup>8</sup>

The 1912 Ordinance sanctioned only the use of able-bodied male labour on communal projects. This was in conformity with the traditional gender division of labour whereby men performed the most strenuous and hard tasks while women and children performed light tasks which in most cases were more repetitive and therefore time-consuming. As Luka Namulala explained,

the kind of communal labour contributed under the traditional system was entirely restricted to the clearance of water-courses and the construction of

---

<sup>8</sup> KNA, 1912 Native Authority Ordinance, section 8 (h).

light bridges over streams, foot and cattle paths. This communal labour did not make large demands on the community, and was done at times most convenient to the villagers and in a spirit of goodwill because at the end of the day's work, the village elders invited all participants to a beer drinking session. Communal labour was also a social event. No man in a village missed to participate in communal labour. Work arrangement and day were agreed upon by villagers. These were also moments when elders freely discussed and disclosed the various medicinal plants and roots to the team of working men. It was a great moment of cultural and oral education.<sup>9</sup>

Clearly, under the traditional system of communal labour, there was no system of oppressive fines or tyrannous imprisonment to enforce the orders of their chosen elders. Under the traditional system, labour required for the construction of foot paths and bridges was therefore the responsibility of adult males. However, because of massive male migration to work on settler farms, women and children now provided the main source of forced labour, contrary to the traditional gender division of labour and the provisions of the 1910 and 1912 ordinances which restricted such labour to able-bodied men.

The continuous use of female and child labour was supported by the colonial state because it freed up male labour for waged labour in both rural and urban settings. Thus, colonial labour ordinances were not implemented, suggesting that they worked systematically to camouflage and

---

<sup>9</sup> Luka Namulala, oral interview, Musese, Bungoma, 14/9/1987.

perpetuate the exploitation of women and children for the benefit of both African patriarchs and the settler economy.

Missionaries provided evidence of forced labour. Henry D. Hooper stated that, "chiefs and headmen put more pressure on those natives whom they knew could not resist, old men, women and children."<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the use of female and child labour on communal projects intensified as the demand for male migrant labour increased. As Hooper observed, "the more pressure there is put upon the men to go and labour outside the reserve the more necessary it becomes to employ women for local work."<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Archdeacon W. E. Owen, who lived in Western Kenya, correctly pointed out that, "very few men, comparatively speaking do any public work in the majority of reserves. It is done by women and children"<sup>12</sup>

In addition, Owen accurately observed:

forced labour in the Reserves in Kenya is mainly concerned with the making and maintainance of non-trunk roads, and with the building and upkeep of the many rest camps used by administrative officers

---

<sup>10</sup> International Missionary Council (IMC) Box 247, 18/10/1924. Henry D. Hooper was one of the missionaries who lived and worked in East Africa.

<sup>11</sup> IMC, Box 239, Memorandum by H.D.Hooper, Church Missionary Society, Kenya Colony, Dec. 27th, 1920.

<sup>12</sup> IMC, Box 239, Kenya: Native Labour. Archdeacon William Eden Owen lived in rural areas with the indigenous population, and as a result, he made useful observations on the use of female and child labour. He also gathered accurate information on the use of female and child labour in forced communal activities. In fact about 50 percent of the able-bodied men escaped the demands of forced labour. For details, see CO 533/404/13, Notes on W.E.Owen's statement at a meeting at the Colonial Office, Dec. 16th, 1930.

on tour. It is a feature of our administration which arouses the bitterest feelings amongst the Africans. It falls upon that section which is least able to resist the demand.<sup>13</sup>

Indeed building and upkeep of rest camps was a totally new demand and obviously not one provided for in the traditional division of labour.

Women and children's participation became more noticeable and outnumbered male labour in Western Province in the 1920s. Owen argued that there was something wrong with a system which authorized the use of female and child labour on forced communal projects. In a letter to the Manchester Guardian, he argued, "they pay hut and poll tax to the Central Revenue and local rates to the Native Council Fund."<sup>14</sup> Why could road work not be paid for out of these taxes? He added, "there is good reason for believing that if taxation from Africans were to be spent honestly in developing the areas from which the taxation is drawn there would be ample and to spare, to pay voluntary labour to do the work now required compulsorily to be done without payment."<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> For more information, see CO 533/404/13, Notes on W.E.Owen's statement at meeting at the Colonial Office, Dec. 16th., 1930.

<sup>14</sup> Manchester Guardian, 23rd, May 1929. Letter from W.E.Owen.

<sup>15</sup> Manchester Guardian, Letter to the editor on Forced Labour: Kenya Episode by Owen, 23rd, May 1929. "An analysis of the 1931 estimates show a vote of £48,000 for the small non-trunk road system in European areas, but only £9,400 for the much larger system in the reserves.... The reserves get £9,400, although their combined area is much greater than the the European area.... This £9,400 covers only a small

The Murunga incident illustrates that the 1920s witnessed the emergence of serious criticism about the use of women and children as compulsory labour. Owen collected evidence of the extensive use of female and child labour in Western Province and other parts of the old Nyanza Province. Cases reported by Owen illustrate how women and children were used in the so-called communal projects. These cases also serve to demonstrate male control over this labour. On Friday May 3rd, 1929, along the Malakisi-Mumias road, Owen saw "five women and an oldish man working on the road. Three of the women fled, but two of them I was able to question. One of them had a baby which a very old man held while she worked."<sup>16</sup> Owen asked them "where their husbands were and was told that they were out of the reserve at work."<sup>17</sup> Following this discussion, Owen told the women that, "King George did not

---

proportion of their cost. The bulk of the work on these roads is done by men who are forced to do the work and are neither paid for it nor given rations." For more information see, CO 533/404/13, Notes on W.E.Owen's statement at meeting at the Colonial Office. Present, Dr. Drummond Shiels, Sir. C. Bottomley, Mr. C. C. Parkinson and W.E.Owen, December, 16th. 1930. E.A. Brett quoting from other sources noted that, "the Native District Councils spent on average £7,520 per annum from their own funds on roads from 1925 to 1938. Amery told the Commons that £50,850 was to be spent on roads in the settled areas, £32,550 in the African areas in 1929, but Archdeacon Owen's memorandum to the Colonial Office in 1930 claimed that only £9,264 was spent on non-trunk roads in African areas, £44,964 on such roads in settled areas. For details see, Brett, Colonialism and Underdevelopment in East Africa.

<sup>16</sup> CO 533/386/12, letter from Archdeacon W.E.Owen to the District Commissioner, North Kavirondo, 6th May 1929.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.,

want women to be forced to work on the roads, and explained to them what the law said."<sup>18</sup> In another incident, there were two boys in a gang which was repairing a bridge. Owen queried the supervisor about the presence of the two boys and "the nyapara in charge told me that they were working because their fathers were too old to work. I told them what I had told the women."<sup>19</sup> On the same road, Owen found that "two quite young children a girl and a boy" were working because "their father was ill."<sup>20</sup> Similarly, on the Mumias-Kakamega road, Owen saw a small gang which included "a man with his two daughters, Ndibale Cumba and Sumba. The man who looked ill said, he was not up to the work so brought his two daughters out to help him with it."<sup>21</sup>

Additional evidence on the use of child labour on roads was reported by Owen throughout the year. For example in

---

<sup>18</sup> Generally, indigenous communities in Kenya were ignorant about what the law said because all legal documents were written in English. William Owen had however requested that the law should be translated into Kiswahili. But his suggestion was rejected. In one report, Owen stated: "it is a fundamental Reformation Principle of our church, and of England, that documents of public worship or of public policy be published in a language understood by the people." For details see CO 533/510/16, "Child Labour in Kenya" in Manchester Guardian, 22/2/1939. He added, "I have protested for years in English and local press against this Kenya policy of excluding the vast bulk of the British citizens of Kenya, the Africans, from a knowledge of what documents and laws say, by its refusal to use Swahili in official publications."

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.,

July, Owen saw " two small children a boy and a girl, Juma and Namayi of Ibuka, nyapara Miyula. They said that their father was ill."<sup>22</sup> In fact the use of child labour intensified and became worse towards the end of the 1920s. On July 25th, 1929 Owen met " a large safari (group) of men and boys, many of the latter quite children..." and when he enquired from one of the men in charge of the gangs, whether it was voluntary or ordered labour, he replied that,

It was by order. About 50 percent of his gangs were children ranging from about 9 or 10 years to 14 years. I asked why children were in a gang of "ordered labour" and was told that some were sent by adults who did not themselves wish to comply with the order and that some were taken because there was no adult available in their homes. I asked what happened when the adult was away wage-earning out of the "Reserves" and was told that a child would be taken in that case.<sup>23</sup>

The cases reported by Owen above provide clear indications that the pre-colonial patriarchal traditions were now being strengthened since male heads of households were controlling female and child labour activities beyond the

---

<sup>22</sup> KNA, Owen Papers Box 1, Forced Labour, 16/5/1929.

<sup>23</sup> CO 533/386/12, Letter from Archdeacon W.E.Owen to the District Commissioner, North Kavirondo, 6th May, 1929. Owen adds: " as you may be aware my object in keeping a record of what I see of forced labour is to arouse public opinion in England to the need for a revision of the whole system. It is not intended as a criticism of officers charged with the task of carrying out road work by a system to which they have no alternative, and which is so susceptible of abuse at the hands of those ultimately responsible for impressing the actual workers. I have tried for some ten years to get the system reformed locally, without success, and am now concentrating on working for reform from home." KNA, Owen Papers, Box 1, Forced Labour in Kenya, letter from Owen to District Commissioner Central Kavirondo.

needs of the household (see appendix A). It is interesting to compare the statements made by the headman, children and their fathers in appendix A. There is no correlation between the statements provided by fathers and the headman on the one hand and the children on the other. They were all made up to justify the use of children's labour on work assignment which required male adult labour. The four children's statements (see appendix A) do not suggest that they had accompanied their parents.

Additional cases of the use of forced female labour were provided by William McGregor Ross, Director of Public Works Department (PWD). Ross gave his evidence to refute the acting governor's statement that, "no such labour has been called out at any time."<sup>24</sup> McGregor Ross suggested that Denham must have been misinformed because:

there must be scores, if not hundreds of settlers who have seen female labour employed at Government stations ... some residents or travellers who have seen this ... may even have taken photographs."<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> CO 533/748, letter from acting Governor, Edward Denham to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 31st July, 1927. The Secretary of State had been questioned in the House of Commons about the use of female labour in Kenya. When the acting governor was asked, he replied, "compulsory labour is not countenanced by the Colonial Government and no such labour has been called out at any time."

<sup>25</sup> CO 533/748, Female Labour in Kenya, letter from W. McGregor Ross to Anthony Booir, Colonial Office, Nov 15th, 1927.



Indeed, he added, "this labour was forced, unpaid and even unfed."<sup>26</sup> Ross's evidence came from settlers, European travellers and missionaries.

Ross was even able to cite settler opposition to forced female labour from persons whose names he refused to divulge. Comments upon female labour in Kenya in 1927 were as follows:

July 5th, 1927: "I want to start a campaign against forced, unpaid, women labour, but may not be able to get on this for the present." [Received August 1st].

August 30th, 1927: "I enclose a statement of women labour this year... I think I have put the case clearly and plainly."<sup>27</sup>

McGregor Ross reported some additional cases:

(1) On [month] 21-29, 1927, about 80 women were employed in [Government Station]. They were working in a gang herded by tribal retainers and were cleaning the shamba [farm] while the prisoners were cutting the grass [elsewhere]. These women were neither paid nor fed.

(2) On [month 16th. and future days], women were employed cutting and fetching grass... in [station]. There is no grass near owing to its being bush land, and the women have to walk six miles before they can get the right kind of thatching grass. Women were forced out and neither paid nor fed.

(3) In [month] 1927, a large number of women in [District] working unpaid and unfed on a new road in the reserve to join up with the ... farms....All labour was to be free and unpaid. A number of women worked with

---

<sup>26</sup> Co 533/748, female labour in Kenya, McGregor to Booir, Nov 15th, 1927.

<sup>27</sup> CO 533/748, Settler comments upon Native labour conditions in Kenya in 1927. McGregor Ross said, "I need only add that I am aware of the names, dates and localities left blank in the enclosed memo."

their husbands but no compulsion was put on them to do this.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, although formally prohibited, forced female and child labour was a daily reality in the rural areas. As Ross pointed out, "the cases cited are only illustrations of a practice which has always been widespread and which at times still persists, under pressure in various forms and intensities, of which we in this country know little."<sup>29</sup> Ross thus concurred with Owen on this issue.<sup>30</sup>

Labour in colonies like Kenya was regulated by the provisions of the colony's labour legislation: ordinances and circulars. However, the contradictions and loopholes provided by the existence of legal plurality, that is customary requirements and divisions of labour and the new demands which were regulated by ordinances and circulars were once again employed by colonial officials to justify the exploitation of women and children's labour. While the colonial ordinances and circulars exempted women and children from compulsory or forced labour activities, these regulations were neither

---

<sup>28</sup> CO 533/748, Notes on forced women labour enclosed in a letter from McGregor Ross to Anthony Booir, Nov. 15th, 1927. McGregor Ross adds: of course no one [emphasis original] must get into trouble for anything I have said...[they] are excellent young D.Cs, keen, energetic and all out for the natives in their charge. I will not harm them in any way for anything. I know you will understand this and how important it is.

<sup>29</sup> CO 533/748, Letter from William McGregor Ross, Director of Public Works Department (P.W.D.) to the Governor, Kenya colony on Female Labour in Kenya, Nov. 15th, 1927.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid...

enforced nor observed. The 1910 Roads in Native Reserves Ordinance and the 1912 Native Authority Ordinances exempted women and children from labour needed for the construction and maintenance of roads. This was in total agreement with the pre-colonial division of labour which exempted women and children from heavy labour such as what was required for the construction of foot paths, cattle paths, roads and bridges. On the contrary, evidence provided by Owen and Ross suggests that women and children constituted the majority of this labour. Labour Ordinances were not effected. Consequently, labour ordinances failed to protect women and children from excessive exploitation by colonial chiefs, headmen, settlers and male patriarchs. Obviously, in the traditional division of labour women and children were not expected to turn out for public works.

As Paul Zeleza correctly observed, "the worst abuses of forced labour and certainly the most widely publicised occurred in the reserves under the disguise of communal labour"<sup>31</sup> Communal labour activities as they existed in pre-colonial African societies were emptied of their social and cultural meaning and remoulded into vehicles of extortion and exploitation, with particularly dire consequences for women and children. Communal labour was no longer organised by village elders. Communal labour did not serve the

---

<sup>31</sup> P. T. Zeleza, "Dependent Capitalism and the Making of the Kenyan Working Class During the Colonial Period," Ph.D Thesis, Dalhousie University, 1982, p.122.

immediate interests of the local community. Communal labour was no longer the responsibility of adult males. In fact as Makhanu Namuteke stated,

the colonial system of communal labour took men, women and children away from their villages. It was difficult labour which was supervised by harsh men appointed by colonial chiefs and headmen. "Asikari kanga" (communal labour supervisors) took away your goats, sheep, chicken and sometimes cattle if you did not send a child or your wife to represent you.<sup>32</sup>

Sometimes, communal labour was used by chiefs and headmen on their own farms. Chief Sifuma among the Tachoni for instance, benefitted greatly from the use of women's and children's labour.<sup>33</sup> In the 1920s and later years the contradictions between labour ordinances and reality suggest that colonial appointed chiefs appropriated female and children's labour for their own fields.<sup>34</sup> The chiefs' interests were supported and protected by the colonial state under the 1902 Village Headman's Ordinance.

It must be emphasized that while men worked for wages, women and children fulfilled the non-wage labour activities. This differential access to cash economy through wage employment made it necessary for women and children to submit to patriarchal control. Women and to some limited degree,

---

<sup>32</sup> Makhanu Namuteke, Oral interview, Chwele-Busakala, 17/11/1987.

<sup>33</sup> Jacob Sitati, Oral interview, Lukusi, Webuye 14/2/1988.

<sup>34</sup> Wanyonyi Kasuti, Oral Interview 7/12/1987. See chapter three for additional information on how colonial appointed chiefs used female and child labour on their own farms.

children participated in public labour requirements in addition to their usual burden of domestic chores. Children were exempted from public labour by the 1912 Native Authority Ordinance. However, the governor ignored this ordinance and supported the traditional male patriarchal authority which sanctioned parental control over children's labour and argued in defence of the headmen. Traditional practices were on many occasions invoked by the colonial officials and chiefs to justify the exploitation of women and children.

The question of female and children's participation in forced or compulsory labour activities was a controversial issue. The campaign against forced labour involved missionaries, Christian organisations in England, the still existing Anti-Slavery Society, and a maverick ex-Kenya hand, Dr. Norman Leys.<sup>35</sup> Certainly, the involvement of women and children in forced labour activities particularly caught the attention of missionaries like Archdeacon William E. Owen and others opposed to the use of female and child labour on public

---

<sup>35</sup> Frederick Cooper aptly states, "the controversy over forced labour that erupted in East Africa in the 1920s offers the best illustration of the continuing importance not only of the image of slavery, but of the basic tenets of antislavery ideology and their relationship to changing economic interests. And the controversies of the 1920s hint at the ideological connections between antislavery and the beginnings of a new and still flourishing humanitarian ideal-economic development." For details, see F. Cooper, From Slaves to Squatters: Plantation Labour and Agriculture in Zanzibar and Coastal Kenya, 1890-1925, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), pp. 62-68.

projects in the rural areas. Owen raised uncomfortable questions, such as:

Does the absence of the male wage-earning mean that more work of a communal nature is thrown on the women? Are demands for communal unpaid labour much greater under an era of development than they were under the old tribal conditions?<sup>36</sup>

Indeed, Owen successfully kept the forced labour issue alive in British politics. He constantly wrote articles on forced labour to the British press and government officials were informed of the situation. His real objective in writing was to draw attention to the use of compulsory labour on roads within the reserves, and particularly in Nyanza Province, as he was not satisfied that reserve roads received their full share of government expenditure. As a result, the British Labour government of 1929-1931 and the International Labour Organisation were also supplied with adequate information on forced labour activities in Kenya.

Other humanitarian pressure groups both in London and Kenya protested against this as well. In a memorandum on forced labour in Kenya, the London Group on African Native Affairs drew attention to the system of forced labour in Kenya. Attacking the oft-repeated justification that such forced labour was merely a continuation of traditional communal labour patterns, the Group argued succinctly that:

...forced labour as applied in Kenya is entirely alien to tribal customs and practices, and that it

---

<sup>36</sup> KNA, Owen Papers Box 1.

is applied oppressively and in such a manner as to foster grave unrest and distrust.<sup>37</sup>

The Group pointed out that the use of women and children's labour in the construction of roads and rest-camps for the administrative officers was not sanctioned by customary practices, and that although women were technically exempt from forced labour, they were continuously employed.<sup>38</sup> Indeed as Owen correctly observed, the new system of communal labour "bears no recognizable relation to the communal services of the clans before our administration, is entirely of our creation (emphasis original), and the sanctions behind it are not traditional clan or tribal sanctions, but statutory

---

<sup>37</sup> CO 533/408/10, Memorandum on Forced Native Labour in Kenya to the Governor, Kenya colony by the London Group on Native Affairs, 30th. May, 1931. The London Group on African Native Affairs was founded on the principles and politics of the South African Joint Councils of Europeans and Africans to assist the improvement of race relationship in Africa. See also CO 533/748, letter from Acting Governor, Edward Denham, to the Secretary of State, Leopold S. Amery, 31st. July, 1927. But, in response to the memorandum by the London Group on Native Affairs, the governor of Kenya in a letter to Lord Passfield stated: "Native customs sees nothing wrong whatever in compulsory labour for women and children and under that custom, before the construction of roads and bridges, native women and children were compelled to spend a great part of their lives carrying to market loads which the average man would lift with difficulty, if at all". For details see CO 533/408/10, letter from Governor, Kenya colony to the Secretary of State for the colonies, August 4th, 1931.

<sup>38</sup> CO 533/748, letter from Acting Governor to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 31st July 1927 in which he quotes Mr. Maxwell, the Chief Native Commissioner who stated that, "it occasionally happens that male natives, on being called upon for labour on roads under the Native Authority Ordinance send out their women and children in their place."

laws with their heavy penalties."<sup>39</sup> In fact this practice became more widespread in the 1920s and early 1930s. The projects also became harder, larger and took longer to complete.<sup>40</sup>

The missionaries launched a broad-based opposition against the continuous use of forced labour. Owen and the London Group blamed heavy demands on African male labour by the settlers and the colonial government. Owen argued:

The most potent factor, since our rule in Kenya, which has increased the burden imposed upon the women has been the demand for the labour of the men on the part of the non-African employers. These men leave home to seek for the task money in large numbers and, of course, this throws a very heavy burden on the women who remain behind to keep the home going.<sup>41</sup>

Furthermore, the missionaries argued that forced labour was uneconomical. Owen continued his earlier campaign by arguing that, "forced labour in Kenya was a symptom of a much deeper disease i.e. wrong expenditure of direct taxation of Africans. There is, I believe, plenty of money to pay for the work now performed by unpaid labour if the expenditure on services was

---

<sup>39</sup> CO 533/404/13, Notes on W.E.Owen's Statement at meeting at Colonial Office, Dec. 16th, 1930 present Dr. Drummond Shiels, Sir C.Bottomley, Mr. Parkinson and Owen.

<sup>40</sup> Referring to the London group, the governor argued, "the additional work thrown upon women by their husbands' absence for two days a month cannot be considerable" See CO 533/408/10, letter from Governor Kenya colony to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, on compulsory labour, 4th August, 1931. See CO 533/408/10, The London Group on Native Affairs, May 30th. 1931.

<sup>41</sup> Manchester Guardian, letter to the editor by W.E.Owen, July 3rd, 1931.



redistributed"<sup>42</sup> Indigenous communities, in fact, paid taxes which helped develop the infrastructure in the so-called "white settler areas".<sup>43</sup>

The various missionary groups were particularly concerned about the moral consequences of forced female and child labour. In some cases, women and girls worked on projects which were far from home. The missionaries reported numerous cases of girls being seized for government work (which meant days away from home). One girl, conscripted by a labour gang, was violated by six different tribal retainers in one night.<sup>44</sup> This was an exceptionally bad case, but, the problem continued to concern the missionaries. As a missionary, Henry Hooper discovered that, "women and girls who slept away from their homes were forced to 'sleep' with one or

---

<sup>42</sup> KNA, Owen Papers Box 1, "Forced Labour in Kenya."

<sup>43</sup> Brett adds that, "... perhaps for the benefit of missionaries and the liberal press, that taxation of Europeans reduced their incentive to produce, while that on Africans forced them to engage in modern economic pursuits which would not otherwise have interested them. ... a tax system of this kind could be expected actually to increase poverty and dependence in the native reserves by a net transfer of resources out of them- in this case by creating a system which forced a large percentage of the able-bodied men to go out to work in the public or private sector and simultaneously through low wages and high taxes supply that sector with the surplus used to build up its productive capacity." In fact, the system of taxation as Brett accurately states, formed the colonial financial policy- that African should pay and Europeans should receive. For details see Brett, Colonialism and Underdevelopment in East Africa, pp.191-200.

<sup>44</sup> IMC, Box 239, Native Labour in Kenya. Similar cases are explained in Clayton and Savage, Government and Labour in Kenya, pp.119-203.

several of the chief's native supervisors." <sup>45</sup> The missionaries called for a "prohibition of the labour of women involving absence from home at night."<sup>46</sup>

To the critics of forced labour in Kenya such as Owen, the point was clear, that, "Empire development has meant more forced labour on roads."<sup>47</sup> The use of women and children's unpaid labour was a clear case of exploitation. Development in African reserves depended on the use of compulsory communal labour which was performed by women and children in large numbers.<sup>48</sup> This retarded development in African reserves because similar work in settler areas was "regularly carried out with moneys provided out of Central Revenue."<sup>49</sup> Similarly, compulsory labour encouraged underdevelopment in African reserves because its continuous use implied that Africans did not get a fair return in services such as education, roads and medicine for the direct taxation imposed upon them. Owen for instance cited the hospital at Kakamega

---

<sup>45</sup> IMC, Box 238, letter from Hooper to J.H.Oldham, 15/8/1921.

<sup>46</sup> IMC, Box 238, letter from J.H.Oldham to Major Edward Wood, Colonial Office, 23/8/1921

<sup>47</sup> East African Standard, 14th. September, 1930.

<sup>48</sup> W.E.Owen, letter to the editor, Manchester Guardian, 7/3/1931, in which Owen stated that, "no records are kept of this forced labour. It is a very large number."

<sup>49</sup> CO 533/408/10, Compulsory labour for communal purposes in native reserves, 18th March, 1932.

(Western Province) which was without any maternity section.<sup>50</sup>

While the colonial administrative officials admitted that abuses and misuse of compulsory labour did exist, they blamed the traditional system for the abuses that went on under their supervision, and argued that they had little effective power to check the abuses. However, the colonial administration in Kenya did not repeal the 1912 Native Authority Ordinance. As the Chief Native Commissioner argued:

I do not therefore recommend the immediate repeal of section 8 (h) of the Native Authority Ordinance, the sub-section authorizing compulsory communal work for the benefit of the communities concerned, but I propose to issue instructions that recourse be made to this sub-section in a decreasing degree until the time comes for its repeal.<sup>51</sup>

But the colonial administrative officials, both local and in the colonial office in Britain had mixed feelings about the participation of women and children in compulsory labour activities. This was partly because of the pressure from the critics of forced labour and the use of women and children in this kind of labour both in Britain and in Kenya. It was also as a result of the Convention adopted at the 14th session of the I.L.O in 1930. Under the terms of this Convention each state ratifying it was to undertake to suppress the use of forced or compulsory labour, as defined by Article 2, in all

---

<sup>50</sup> CO 533/404/13, Notes on W.E.Owen's statement in a meeting at colonial office.

<sup>51</sup> CO 533/408/10, Compulsory labour for communal purposes in Native Reserves, Circular No.16, from A.De C.Wade, Native Affairs Department, 18th March, 1932.

its forms within the shortest possible period.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, changes in the reserves indicated some new sense of awarenesses and plans of action which sought to replace forced communal labour with paid voluntary labour. In North Kavirondo (Western Province), "Local Native Council has imposed an extra Sh.1.00 to pay for all labour on Native roads and thus avoid the necessity for forced labour altogether."<sup>53</sup> The arrangement, argued the Secretary of State, "was preferable to the continuance of compulsory unpaid labour... but there is considerable objection to levying of special rates by local Native Councils for this purpose so long as similar expenditure on roads in European areas falls on general revenue."<sup>54</sup> Clearly, the minority Labour Government of 1929-1931 was more sympathetic than its predecessors to the critics of forced labour issues in Kenya.

The colonial labour ordinances exempted women and children from forced or compulsory labour obligations. The

---

<sup>52</sup> For details on the 1930 I.L.O. Convention, see CO 533/408/10, letter from Secretary of State to the Governor Kenya colony, 16th May, 1931.

<sup>53</sup> KNA, 1929/30 Native Affairs Department Annual Report. See also letter from Governor, Kenya colony to the Secretary of State, CO 533/408/10, 14/12/1931. The governor for instance stated, "that communal labour is in some cases felt to be a burden is proved by the fact that in North Kavirondo (WP), Machakos and Kiambu (three of the most progressive districts in the colony) the local Native Councils have made provision for paid labour to take the place of the unpaid compulsory labour."

<sup>54</sup> CO 533/408/10, letter from Secretary of State to the governor of Kenya colony, 16th May, 1931.

Acting Governor, Edward Denham, clearly stated, "the compulsory employment of female and children on road work, or indeed on any form of labour is not countenanced by the colonial government."<sup>55</sup> However the colonial officials blamed the continuous use of women and children in forced communal activities on "tribal customs". As Denham stated:

...tribal custom, which exists amongst many of the tribes in the colony prescribes that women should do work of the nature of road clearing, is not necessarily broken down.<sup>56</sup>

In addition, the governor argued:

It is not always possible to prevent the exercise of parental authority by which children are made to perform a reasonable amount of work of such a nature as is suited to their years.... It is not always possible to prevent even if such prevention were desirable, children from voluntarily accompanying and assisting their elders, and it is not always possible to prevent children from acting as substitutes for their elders.<sup>57</sup>

When such an event happened, women and children were at once "to be sent back by the person in charge of the work and the defaulting males be prosecuted."<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, Governor Denham pointed out:

---

<sup>55</sup> CO 533/408/10, letter from Acting Governor, Kenya colony to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Amery, 31st. July, 1931. See also, CO 533/748, Female Labour in Kenya, Letter from the Governor Kenya Colony to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 31/7/1935.

<sup>56</sup> CO 533/748, Ibid., 31/7/1935.

<sup>57</sup> CO 533/386/12, letter from Governor, Kenya Colony to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 28th September, 1929.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.,

it is not always possible for Administrative Officers or other Europeans to exercise complete supervision over all the road work which is being done in the district, and frequently the labour is under the control of a native chief, who does not recognise the objections to female and child labour.<sup>59</sup>

The colonial labour law was difficult to enforce because of the co-existence of the traditional division of labour and the new labour laws. The officials were on the defensive.

However, some colonial officials opposed the involvement of women and children in forced labour activities. Critics of forced labour issues such as Drummond Shiels, Labour's Parliamentary Under-Secretary, intensified their campaign during the 1929-1931 period when the minority Labour government was in power. Shiels opposed forced labour because, "it is a bad system and it should be gradually eliminated. Why are white settlers not ordered out to do up the roads in their area?"<sup>60</sup> McGregor Ross lamented the laxity among colonial officials and their willingness to bend the law, and urged the colonial government to use local administration to enforce the clause which exempted women and children from forced labour activities.

---

<sup>59</sup> CO 533/748 letter from Acting Governor Kenya colony to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Amery, 31st. July 1927. See also CO 533/408/10, letter from Governor Kenya colony to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Lord Passfield, 4th. August, 1931.

<sup>60</sup> CO 533/396/5, memorandum on alleged injustices to natives in Kenya by Drummond Shiels, 11th March, 1930.

While critics of forced labour received verbal support from Kenyan and British officials, in practice little was done to stop forced labour abuses. As a result Kenya had the worst record of forced labour abuses in East Africa. These abuses had serious consequences. As Archdeacon Owen pointed out:

The burden [of forced labour] is rarely equally distributed, and it is difficult, if not impossible to prevent serious abuse when powers of selection are in the hands of petty native authorities. There is also created a sense of insecurity which may affect adversely the growth of confidence in the Administration. Corruption and bribery are encouraged in the desire to escape service. Forced labour is rarely economically used, and its incidence allows of unthinking interference in the home and economic life of the community.<sup>61</sup>

---

<sup>61</sup> Manchester Guardian, March 7th, 1931, letter to the editor on forced labour in Kenya by W.E.Owen. In addition, Owen observed that statistics on forced labour called out under Native Authority Ordinance section 8 (h) were not kept. For example, appendix C of the 1929 Annual Report of the Native Affairs Department show that in 1929, a total of 108,113 men-days of forced labour... This figure of 108,113 men-days is actually an increase of 21,526 men-days on the comparable figure for 1928 and is considerably in excess of the figures for the three previous years. For details, see CO 533/408/10, letter from the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Lord Passfield to the Governor, Kenya colony, 16th May, 1931. The statistics on compulsory labour called out under Native Authority Ordinance were as follows:

Compulsory Labour, 1922-1929.

Year	No. Ordered	Days worked	Average days per man.
1922	10,547	124,855	11.73
1923	25,501	241,196	9.45
1924	19,323	151,064	7.80
1925	15,240	76,264	5.00
1926	13,228	56,781	4.29
1927	12,809	95,975	7.49
1928	12,897	86,587	6.71
1929	9,657	108,113	11.20

Source: CO 533/396, memorandum on alleged injustices to native peoples in Kenya by Dr. Drummond Shiels.

Moreover, women and children's participation in forced labour activities diverted their energy and efforts from peasant subsistence production. As Miriam Wangwe reported, "communal labour on road work was the most difficult of all. At the beginning, we worked in our village roads, but from 1933 onwards, we used to work in neighbouring villages. The work was increased especially when bwana D.C was supposed to visit a particular village or even just pass through."<sup>62</sup> Sometimes, added Miriam, "road work was called out in the middle of the weeding or harvesting season."<sup>63</sup> Women and children began to work outside the household economic system. Their work intensified as they struggled to participate in both economies, and as a result, rural productivity declined which also resulted in the 1943 major food shortages.

The power of African patriarchs over women and children's labour increased as well. Women and children were forced by the colonial chiefs and headmen to submit to male patriarchal control and demands. Patriarchal authority was buttressed by the colonial state. Women and children were doubly liable to male and state control through the authority of chiefs and headmen. Forced labour was oppressive. It was uneconomical.

---

The above statistics were culled from various Native Affairs Annual Reports. See also Clayton and Savage, Government and Labour in Kenya, 1895-1963, p.153, Appendix 1.

<sup>62</sup> Miriam Wangwe, Oral interview Buntonge, Malakisi, 2/3/1988.

<sup>63</sup> Miriam Wangwe, Oral interview, Butonge, Malakisi, 2/3/1988.



It was destructive. Female and child labour abuses were rampant. Missionaries, the humanitarian lobby and other liberal critics of forced labour in Kenya may have raised the issue and attempted to improve matters for women and children, but they never questioned the use of state coercion for private profit. Indeed, as Cooper accurately observed, anti-Slavery ideology of the abolitionists, humanitarianism of the early 20th century, and the prescriptions of development economics of the last few decades, share a common ideological thread because they offer no more than a liberal criticism of capitalism. It was this failure to criticise the fundamental nature of the colonial political economy which made the practice of forced labour so difficult to stop.

Women and Children's Participation in Wage Labour in Kenya, 1919-1963.

In 1919 the Northey Labour Circulars issued under the signature of John Ainsworth, the Chief Native Commissioner, for the first time encouraged women and children to participate in wage labour. In a circular letter to all district commissioners and colonial officials in Kenya, the governor issued new instructions which stated:

- 1) All government officers in charge of native areas must exercise every possible influence to induce able-bodied male natives to go into the labour fields. 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 (emphasis mine).

2) Native Chiefs and Elders must at all times render all possible lawful assistance on the foregoing lines. They should be repeatedly reminded that it is part of their duty to advise and encourage all unemployed young men in the areas under their jurisdiction to go out and work in plantations. They should be encouraged to visit plantations where their people are employed.

3) District Commissioners will keep a record of the names of these Chiefs and Headmen who are helpful and those who are not helpful, and will make reports to me from time to time for the information of His Excellency.<sup>64</sup>

The 1919 Northey Labour Circular marked the emergence of waged female and child labour. However, female and child labour tended to be casual, paid by day and was cheap compared to adult male labour.<sup>65</sup> Consequently, settlers were

---

<sup>64</sup> KNA, PC/NZA/3/20/17/1, letter from the Chief Native Commissioner to the Provincial Commissioner, Nyanza Province.

<sup>65</sup> KNA, PC/NZA/3/20/17/1, 28/7/1925. In 1925, following the 1924 Report of the Finance and Labour Commission in Kenya, the department of labour issued what it considered as acceptable minimum rates of wages for unskilled labour as indicated in the table below. The use of words like minimum neither reflected the actual wages paid to such labourers nor were the wages paid by individual settler farmers as uniform as the table suggests. The term minimum was only used as a defensive measure against the critics of low wages in Kenya, but in reality there were no minimum wage rates.

Minimum rates of wages, (unskilled labour).

Class of Labour Rate of wage

Coffee (pickers) 20-25 cents with food per 4 gallons of "cherry"

Plantation hands

(sisal) Shs.16-18 with food per 30 days work.

Farm labourers

(non-residents) shs.12-14 with food per 30 days work.

Farm-labourers

(squatters) shs.6-12 " " (majority shs.8).

Women and Children

Juveniles (generally) Shs.6-8 with food per 30 days work.

Women (generally) Shs.10-12 with food per 30 days work.

Dock labourers

(Kilindini) Kshs.1.50-2.00 without food per day.

General labourers

attracted to women's and children's labour because of its low cost. This was particularly true of the more marginal settler farms. In an editorial in the East African Standard, it was pointed out that "the question of recruiting female labour in the native reserves was on the ground that women's labour was cheaper"<sup>66</sup> Undoubtedly, child labour was the cheapest. The employment of juveniles was obviously based on the production factor. Some settler farmers employed juveniles to reduce costs of production. Child labour required less supervision. Children were paid less than women and adult male labourers. All these factors made this labour more attractive to settler capital because female and child labour was plentiful, cheap, available on a daily (seasonal) basis and fairly pliable.

The humanitarian lobby condemned the Circular. The Bishops of Mombasa and Uganda and the head of the Church of Scotland Mission sent protests. The Bishop of Zanzibar condemned it out of hand. The other bishops were more ambiguous because, although they believed ideally all labour should be voluntary, both waged and for communal purposes, insufficient voluntary labour existed in Kenya, and therefore

---

(out-districts) shs.16-18 with food per 30 days work.  
Townships shs.18-20 with food.

Railway

construction Shs.16-20 with food per 30 days work.  
Maintenance Shs.16-18 with food per 30 days work.  
Workshops (semi-skilled) Shs.18-20 with food per 30 days work.  
Public works dept. Shs.16-18 with food per 30 days work.

<sup>66</sup> CO 533/388/15, East African Standard newspaper, 16/2/1929.

"some form of compulsory labour is necessary for the development of the country."<sup>67</sup> The bishops nevertheless opposed the methods of labour recruitment proposed by the Circular, particularly the plan of recruiting labour through chiefs. The bishops argued that compulsory labour should be primarily for state work, leaving the voluntary labour available for work on private estates, because:

The settlers are pouring in in increasing numbers. Every one of these settlers is a potential employer of labour, many of them on a large scale, all of them depend, for their very existence as farmers, on native labour. It is making no unfair imputation on the settlers to say that they will naturally try to exploit the natives- to get as much work out of them as possible for the lowest pay possible.<sup>68</sup>

The bishops were particularly concerned about the references to women and children. Commenting on the 1919 Labour Circular, the East African bishops pointed out the fact that the Circular did not confine itself to able-bodied men. As a result, they argued:

---

<sup>67</sup> The New Statesman, September 18th, 1920.

<sup>68</sup> The New Statesman, editorial commentary on "Our African Scandal" September 18, 1920. See also "Native Labour in Africa" in The New Statesman, April 10, 1920, which pointed out: "British East Africa is a test case for European imperialism in Africa.... In East Africa we can, by legislation and administrative action, impose upon the native inhabitants any economic and social system which we desire. We are, in fact, doing so at the present moment: we are imposing a system which results and is intended to result in the economic subjection and exploitation of the native by the white man. It consists in depriving the African of land, in alienating the land to white settlers, and then compelling the native, by direct or indirect governmental action to work for the settler on wages fixed by the settler."

The decision to "encourage" women and children to labour bearing in mind the meaning that will inevitably be read into the word "encourage" seems to us a dangerous policy. The children below a certain age, should be at home or at school; the women must work at home; the plantation, the supply of daily food, the cooking, the care of the children and of the home depend upon the mothers and wives. To "encourage" as a native headman (with the fear of dismissal behind him) would "encourage" women and girls to go, out from their homes into neighbouring plantations, would be to court disaster, physical and moral. Whatever labour legislation is introduced, the women and children at any rate must be left out of it.<sup>69</sup>

The decision to use female and child labour for private purposes was an attempt by the colonial state to increase the total labour supply without increasing wages. As the East African Standard editorialized:

...we should hesitate to support the acceptance of any principle which encouraged the general employment of "native" children in Kenya where that employment interfered with the education of the child or adversely affected home life either in the reserves or outside.<sup>70</sup>

The settler community in Kenya consisted of rich and poor farmers. This also explains why some settlers encouraged female and child labour while others were totally against it as the evidence provided earlier by Ross and the above quotation suggest. A statement from the North Kavirondo officials school area committee also lamented "the employment

---

<sup>69</sup> IMC Box 240

<sup>70</sup> East African Standard newspaper, march 12, 1928.

of children under twelve years on moral and educational grounds."<sup>71</sup> They urged the colonial government to impose some restrictions. In a letter to the editor, East African Standard, W. J. Rampley, a settler farmer in Trans-Nzoia, stated:

no reasonable objection can be raised in the case of native women volunteering to work on European farms in the vicinity of their homes, there is nevertheless a very serious principle involved regarding married and unmarried women being recruited by Europeans with the object of taking the same women fifty or more miles from their homes.<sup>72</sup>

Thus, employment of women was attacked on moral grounds. In 1923, as a result of pressure from the humanitarian lobby on the question of female participation in wage labour, the governor issued "the 1923 Women Workers Protection Rules". The Rules in part stated:

- (1) No owner shall allow any native woman worker employed by him to remain at night on any farm unless
  - (a) accompanied by her husband, if married or
  - (b) accompanied by her father, or other relative if single or
  - (c) suitable separate or joint female housing accommodation and supervision is provided by the owner to ensure security from molestation of females availing themselves of such accommodation.
- (2) No owner who has not provided such accommodation shall employ any native woman not accompanied as aforesaid on any farm at a

---

<sup>71</sup> KNA, PC/NZA/3/20/17/1, letter from District Commissioner North Kavirondo to the Director of Education, Nairobi, 19/11/1926.

<sup>72</sup> East African Standard, February 16th., 1929, letter from W.J.Rampley to the editor on "Recruiting Female Native Labour"

greater distance than three miles from her home.

- (3) Any owner failing to comply with these Rules, and any person molesting a native woman worker sleeping on a farm in quarters provided as aforesaid, shall be liable to a fine not exceeding fifty shillings for such offence.<sup>73</sup>

While (a) carried out Lord Milner's message contained in his despatch of 22nd July 1920 which made it clear that, women and children must return to their homes at night, and that only when the husband was employed could they be permitted to remain there at night, section (c) went beyond what Lord Milner intended.<sup>74</sup> In addition, the Kenyan women were not aware of the existence of these Rules. They were written in English which meant that even if women had been aware of them, most would not understand them. As a result, the Native Women Protection Rules were neither observed nor implemented. They were part and parcel of the colonial strategy to disguise the exploitation of African women's labour.

Female labour continued to be recruited for work far from their homes. In the case of married women, this work undermined village life. For young unmarried girls, it led to:

...finding themselves grouped together on European plantations with less restraint than even that of home life, which results in their leaving the

---

<sup>73</sup> CO 533/388/15, The Native Women Workers Protection Rules, 1923.

<sup>74</sup> CO 533/388/15, letter from Secretary of State to the Governor, Kenya colony, 19th August 1929. The Secretary was concerned that sub-section (b) and (c) appeared to travel beyond what Lord Milner intended to allow.

Reserves eventually for the various townships, preferring the life of prostitutes to that of being "hewers of wood, and carriers of water".<sup>75</sup>

Such women labourers were forced to stay away from their homes. Thus, in reality the colonial labour legislation and Women Workers Protection Rules did not offer any safeguards to women in practical terms.

Adopting the age limit from the 1910 Master and Servants Ordinance, children in Kenya could legally be employed at the age of ten. In neighbouring Tanganyika (Tanzania) and Uganda, employment began at twelve and fourteen years respectively. Labour legislation, which consisted of a mass of separate ordinances with varying definitions of "child" and "young person" only confused matters. Consequently, there were many contradictions in the legislation both in theory and practice.

Child labour fell under two distinct categories. First, some children found "employment near enough at hand to be able to return home at night and maintain contact with parental restraint and tribal discipline. Second, there was child employment which required children to leave their homes for far distant labour lines for periods of anything up to a year

---

<sup>75</sup> CO 533/388/15, letter from W.J. Rampley to the Governor, Kenya colony, February 13th., 1929. Rampley argued that, "it is difficult, if not impossible to reconcile the fact that measures are taken to prevent women doing communal labour in the Reserves yet allowed to leave their homes to go several miles away, where for the time being, all contact with home and family life is broken."



or longer."<sup>76</sup> Children in employment were frequently recruited by professional labour agents, but the majority of juvenile casual labourers obtained employment without the help of labour agents. Some came alone and others accompanied adults, with or without the knowledge and consent of their parents or guardians.<sup>77</sup>

As Table 1 indicates, child labour increased between 1919-1927, it was stable from 1927-1930 and was down from 1931-1933, perhaps because of the great Depression in the 1930s. The statistics gathered by the colonial authorities were used to defend their labour policies, so no doubt underestimate the actual numbers. However, such statistics indicate the general trends in the labour force during the colonial period. The figures show that women and children constituted the majority of casual labourers, and that child labourers outnumbered female labourers, no doubt because child labour was the cheapest. The decrease in 1921 reflects the recession. The numbers also decline after 1930

Table 1

**Women and Children Employed in Agriculture, 1919-1933**

Year	Women	Children	Casual*	Total
1919	3,917	4,787	-	8,704
1920	4,911	6,539	-	11,450
1921	4,261	5,935	-	10,196
1922	6,609	9,942	-	16,551

<sup>76</sup> CO 533/497/3, letter by Archdeacon Owen to the editor, Manchester Guardian, 16/3/1931.

<sup>77</sup> KNA, DC/KSM/1/17/27, letter from District Commissioner, Kericho to Provincial Commissioner, Nyanza Province.

Reserves eventually for the various townships, preferring the life of prostitutes to that of being "hewers of wood, and carriers of water".<sup>75</sup>

Such women labourers were forced to stay away from their homes. Thus, in reality the colonial labour legislation and Women Workers Protection Rules did not offer any safeguards to women in practical terms.

Adopting the age limit from the 1910 Master and Servants Ordinance, children in Kenya could legally be employed at the age of ten. In neighbouring Tanganyika (Tanzania) and Uganda, employment began at twelve and fourteen years respectively. Labour legislation, which consisted of a mass of separate ordinances with varying definitions of "child" and "young person" only confused matters. Consequently, there were many contradictions in the legislation both in theory and practice.

Child labour fell under two distinct categories. First, some children found "employment near enough at hand to be able to return home at night and maintain contact with parental restraint and tribal discipline. Second, there was child employment which required children to leave their homes for far distant labour lines for periods of anything up to a year

---

<sup>75</sup> CO 533/388/15, letter from W.J. Rampley to the Governor, Kenya colony, February 16th., 1929. Rampley argued that, "it is difficult, if not impossible to reconcile the fact that measures are taken to prevent women doing communal labour in the Reserves yet allowed to leave their homes to go several miles away, where for the time being, all contact with home and family life is broken."

or longer."<sup>76</sup> Children in employment were frequently recruited by professional labour agents, but the majority of juvenile casual labourers obtained employment without the help of labour agents. Some came alone and others accompanied adults, with or without the knowledge and consent of their parents or guardians.<sup>77</sup>

As Table 1 indicates, child labour increased between 1919-1927, it was stable from 1927-1930 and was down from 1931-1933, perhaps because of the great Depression in the 1930s. The statistics gathered by the colonial authorities were used to defend their labour policies, so no doubt underestimate the actual numbers. However, such statistics indicate the general trends in the labour force during the colonial period. The figures show that women and children constituted the majority of casual labourers, and that child labourers outnumbered female labourers, no doubt because child labour was the cheapest. The decrease in 1921 reflects the recession. The numbers also decline after 1930

Table 1

**Women and Children Employed in Agriculture, 1919-1933**

Year	Women	Children	Casual*	Total
1919	3,917	4,787	-	8,704
1920	4,911	6,539	-	11,450
1921	4,261	5,935	-	10,196
1922	6,609	9,942	-	16,551

<sup>76</sup> CO 533/497/3, letter by Archdeacon Owen to the editor, Manchester Guardian, 16/3/1931.

<sup>77</sup> KNA, Dc/KSM/1/17/27, letter from District Commissioner, Kericho to Provincial Commissioner, Nyanza Province.

1923	8,316	11,784	-	20,100
1924	8,477	11,315	-	16,792
1925	6,021	13,717	-	19,738
1926	4,802	15,428	-	20,230
1927	4,654	17,295	5,006	26,955
1928	4,249	15,304	9,371	25,615
1929	3,971	18,124	13,157	35,252
1930	3,387	19,394	7,574	30,354
1931	3,260	15,330	5,926	24,516
1932	3,506	14,610	7,160	25,276
1933	3,536	14,771	6,685	24,992

source: Agricultural census, Government printer, 1925, 1929 and 1934. \*From 1919 to 1926, casual labour as a category did not exist and therefore figures were not available for these years.

because of the World economic depression, which did not improve until later in the decade. In addition, children were employed at a very crucial and early stage in their psychological development, particularly those under fourteen. The employment of children limited their opportunities for education. Furthermore, the small amount of money made by children did little to develop society. Total funds which were directly injected into rural development projects were not channelled through children. In most cases, children's earnings ended up in incidental expenditures such as the purchase of sweets, clothing, storage boxes, cigarettes and beer (see Appendix c). There were however some exceptional cases where children's earnings were for the benefit of their families.

Child labourers experienced many problems. A statement from the Commissioner of the Central Province indicated some of them. As the District Commissioner for Embu explained:

Some of the children were very young girls. Medical opinion as to their ages has been submitted. One boy was in my opinion not more than 9 years of age, I believe him to be 8 years of age. ...I have been informed that the young girls are kept in a special camp, there is no female supervision whatsoever, and the camps are not visited by a European after dark. Taken with allegations made by parents to the effect that many of the girls have returned from the coffee farms infected with venereal disease, and others have never returned having taken up prostitution as a profession and consider that such employment can have harmful effects.<sup>78</sup>

In fact, the Labour Inspector observed that "on many sisal plantations in the Fort Hall (Murang'a) District, the 'Kavirondo' children look a poor neglected lot and very unlikely to improve morally or physically by the life they live"<sup>79</sup> In addition, the medical officer for Murang'a District noted that the custom of employing children for manual labour on farms and railway work was 'becoming prevalent'. He complained about the heavy work-load that children performed:

At Punda Milia sisal Estate and Hiram Craven Estates and at various other sisal estates a very large number of totos (children), are employed, and from my observation, the work which they are given to do was very much too heavy for boys of that age. On the Thika-Nyeri construction, several contractors are employing totos in some cases on heavy rock cutting, and other work which should only be performed by a fit adult. In some cases, notably at Punda Milia and at Abraham and Fuller's camp, T.N.R.C., the general conditions of totos was far from good. The totos in question are all imported from various parts of the Nyanza Province. With regard to the sisal shambas (farms), the

---

<sup>78</sup> KNA, Lab 9/268, General juvenile labour.

<sup>79</sup> KNA, PC/NZA/3/20/17/1, letter from Labour Inspector to the Native Commissioner, Nairobi, 26th June, 1925.

custom seems to be to send an adult Kavirondo back to his country with instructions to bring back as many totos as possible. They apparently are under no agreement, and are neither medically examined, nor are seen by the D.C. In the case of totos on railway work, they are usually signed on an agreement to do light work, but actually the work given them is the same as that of an adult.<sup>80</sup>

Children who worked on sisal estates were underfed. Their food ration was merely two pounds of posho (maize meal) and meat once a week. Thus, the medical officer complained about the food ration because, "this is not the ration to which they are accustomed in their own country. They are being overworked and under-nourished".<sup>81</sup> Children on labour lines could not voice their grievances. Nor could they supplement their rations with local produce because their wages were too low and some children were required to send money to their parents.

Lamenting the deplorable conditions under which women and children worked, the Kericho District Commissioner stated that the food ration was "the weakest point of their welfare as they do not receive a balanced diet"<sup>82</sup> Children were underfed. They appeared physically unfit for the work they were required to perform and living conditions were

---

<sup>80</sup> KNA, PC/NZA/3/20/17/1, Employment of boys under age on plantation apprentices and c., letter from R.A.W. Proctor, medical officer, Murang'a to the Provincial medical officer, Nairobi, 3rd. August, 1925.

<sup>81</sup> KNA, PC/NZA/3/20/17/1, letter from medical officer Murang'a to the Provincial medical officer, Nairobi, 3rd August 1925.

<sup>82</sup> KNA, DC/KSM/1/17/27, letter from District Commissioner, Kericho to Provincial Commissioner, Nyanza Province.

unsuitable. Sisal and tea estates were singled out as the worst offenders of juvenile labour. They employed a considerable number of children on brush work in the factories.<sup>83</sup>

Table 2 below compares the number of adult men and male juveniles employed on tea estates in 1935.

Table 2

Africans Employed on Tea Estates

Estates	Adult Men	Male Juveniles	Total
African Highlands Produce Co. Ltd.	1,942	2,198	4,140
Kenya Tea Co. Ltd. (Brooke Bonds)	1,485	1,287	2,772
Lord Egerton of Tatton's (Jamji Estate)	640	360	1,000
Buret Tea Company	323	344	667
Mau Forest Tea Estate	170	170	340
Orchardson Bros.	74	24	98
Wyngham & Matthews	100	95	195
Colonel Brayne	200	65	265
Total	4,934	4,543	9,477

Source: (KNA, NAD, Annual Report, 1935, p.182).

The above statistics suggest the balance of employment on tea estates. Women were also employed by tea estates but

---

<sup>83</sup> KNA, DC/KSM/1/17/27, letter from labour office, Nairobi to District Commissioner, Central Kavirondo, 5/11/1936.

statistics of labour on tea estates do not provide any figures on the number of women involved. By 1943 Kericho tea estates employed on average 6,500 juveniles on tea picking.<sup>84</sup>

The Chief Native Commissioner urged the government to regulate the flow of child labour, particularly from Kavirondo, because of the steady increase in the number of immature boys on the Thika-Nyeri construction main line camps and sisal plantations. The Chief Native Commissioner explained:

- (1) They appear to me to be often physically unfit for the work required.
- (2) The tendency is for them to drift into towns and become undesirables instead of returning to their reserves.
- (3) Living conditions in big labour camps are not suitable for children.
- (4) The small wage they receive make (sic) it impossible for them to return home under six or seven months, and, as they are not contracted labour, the employer is under no obligation to repatriate them at any time.
- (5) They are often overworked and underfed.<sup>85</sup>

Labour legislation apparently did not safeguard the people it was intended to protect. These abuses led to severe criticism of the colonial labour conditions for women and children.

In an effort to correct some of the abuses, in 1933, the first ordinance on the Employment of Women, Young Persons and

---

<sup>84</sup> KNA Lab 9/268, Memorandum from the Kenya Tea Growers' Association, 3rd January, 1943.

<sup>85</sup> KNA, PC/NZA/3/20/17/1, letter from Labour Inspector to the Chief Native Commissioner, on "Juvenile Labour on plantations" 28th July 1925.



Children Ordinance was enacted. It was later amended in 1935.

The more important provisions of the 1933 Ordinance stated:

- 1) No child under twelve may be employed in any industrial undertaking.
- 2) No child under fourteen may be employed for work on machinery or open cast working or sub-surface working entered by means of a shaft or adit.

The 1937 Employment of Servants (Amendment) Ordinance also stipulated:

- 1) No child under ten years shall be allowed to enter a contract of service.
- 2) A child must have a certificate from the District Commissioner with the parents' consent indicated on it (emphasis added).
- 3) No child under sixteen may be employed as a porter, fuel cutter, trolley or rickshaw boy, on ships at night.

This legislation was designed to prevent criticism of female and child labour abuses and practices in the colony, and to bring Kenya's legislation into line with some international conventions. It was the first breakthrough in legislative protection for women and children. However, in this legislation the definition of a juvenile applied to an Arab, a Baluchi born in Africa, a Comoro Islander, a Malagasy, a Somali or any African who had not reached the apparent age of sixteen years. In a socio-economic system dominated by white capitalist farmers, and characterised by widespread poverty for Africans, this legislation was almost meaningless from the beginning. Legally, children were not supposed to be exploited, but the poverty of their parents, particularly

during the Depression, and the system of racial inequality worked against them.

As a result, neither the professional labour recruiters nor employers observed the age limits. Children below ten continued to be employed in different agricultural and industrial undertakings. The worst case was found in the cashew nut factory of Mr. Lilleywhite at Kilifi near Mombasa. The factory bought cashew nuts along the Kenya Coast, processed them, and packed them for export. Here, the majority of the workers were children. The youngest child was "alleged to be seven years but might have been five years. There were dozens aged nine-twelve, all cracking, shelling and peeling cashewnuts on piece rate. The employer kept no muster roll of his 200 workers, of whom three-quarters were women, children and boys"<sup>86</sup>

The majority of women and children worked as casual labourers on coffee, tea, pyrethrum and sometimes on maize plantations. Women worked as coffee pickers on plantation farms. They also undertook a certain amount of light weeding. The Depression made cheap labour a necessity. In addition, women provided "a useful supply of labour for harvesting maize in the Rift Valley Province"<sup>87</sup> Hence, the report of the economic and finance committee pointed out:

---

<sup>86</sup> CO 859/191/10, Report on the Employment of Juveniles in Kenya- Industry, in Commerce and in Agriculture by Sheila Ann Ogilvie, 3/1/1949.

<sup>87</sup> KNA, NAD, Annual report, 1937, p.205

Coffee picking is by far the most important problem. There were according to the agricultural census 52,249 acres of coffee planted in the colony in 1923 and 60,054 acres in 1924. Thus, at the present rate of development, in about five years' time there may possibly be 100,000 acres under coffee. This means that to deal with the harvest approximately 200,000 units of labour will be required of whom about 60,000 might be women and children. In Kiambu district alone about 26,000 acres are already planted which will require about 50,000 units for picking.<sup>88</sup>

Here, I concur with Van Zwanenberg that, "in a situation where wage levels were not rising fast enough to increase the labour supply to the level of demand, the use of female and child labour was one method of increasing the supply"<sup>89</sup> As a result, demand for female and child labour intensified. It was estimated in 1934 that at the height of the coffee picking season, some 14,000 women and 10,000 children were employed.<sup>90</sup> The 1937 Native Affairs Annual Report confirmed that "the most suitable employment for juveniles is coffee, pyrethrum and tea estates. Adult females make the best coffee

---

<sup>88</sup> KNA, NAD, Annual Report, 1937, p.205. In addition, the Interim Report of Economic and Finance Committee on Native Labour stated: "in this connection it should be noted that a very large number of women are prevented from picking coffee by the necessity of having to travel long distances in search of firewood for their households. Employers should therefore consider the possibility of issuing firewood to the women at the end of a day's work on the plantations." For a more insightful analysis, see Interim Report of Economic and Finance Committee on Native Labour, Nairobi, Government Printer, 1925, p.4.

<sup>89</sup> KNA, Interim Report of Economic and Finance Committee on Native Labour, Nairobi, 1925, p.3. This is also quoted by Van Zwanenberg, Colonial Capitalism and Labour in Kenya.

<sup>90</sup> Van Zwanenberg, Ibid., p. 145.

pickers but male juveniles have proved to be the best pyrethrum pickers and tea pluckers and are therefore in great demand by growers of these crops."<sup>91</sup> Women and children's participation in agricultural wage labour as indicated above was recognised by both the 1933 and 1937 ordinances provided that they (women and children) returned home at the end of a day's work.

Because of the continuous and increased pressure from the humanitarian lobby, labour policy was reviewed from time to time. In 1938, the new Governor of Kenya, Brook Popham received orders from the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Malcolm MacDonald, to amend the 1937 Master and Servants Ordinance. Consequently, a committee was set up to look into the minimum age and conditions of children's employment. The Juvenile Committee discovered that juveniles were employed mostly on the tea estates, gold mines, sisal estates, cotton ginneries, the coffee, pyrethrum and cashewnut industries, on every farm and as domestic servants for Indians."<sup>92</sup> The Juvenile Committee recommended that the legal age of ten, sanctioned by the 1937 Master and Servants Amendment Ordinance be raised to twelve, and that in industrial undertakings, the age should be raised from twelve to fourteen. In addition, the committee recommended that the penal sanctions of the

---

<sup>91</sup> KNA, NAD, Annual Report, 1937, p.206.

<sup>92</sup> Van Zwanenberg, Colonial Capitalism and Labour in Kenya, p. 153.

labour code should not apply to children. The Juvenile Committee's recommendations formed the basis of the 1939 amendment Ordinance on the employment of children.

The Juvenile Committee Report quickly came under fire from the humanitarian lobby in England. Archdeacon Owen strongly criticized the report for failing to address the problem of juvenile labour in Kenya. He urged the government to eliminate child labour in the country. The committee, Owen argued:

...does not comment on the fact that there is no workmen's compensation legislation in force, except in the mining industry, that there is no sickness benefit for occupational illness, that employers accept no responsibility for seeing that the child reaches home after the completion of the contract, and while admitting that drinking does occur among children in labour lines, brushes aside this objection. Strangest of all, there is not a single comment on the fact that labour lines to which the children go are places where sexual immorality is a problem with its spread of venereal disease, that at such places whites disgrace themselves by cohabiting with African women, nor any protest against children being committed to work for periods up to a year or longer in such an atmosphere.<sup>93</sup>

Owen was particularly concerned by the lack of parental control over child labourers, and consequently the decline of the family as an institution for the socialization of children. He added:

These children are not like ours, literate, and therefore able to keep in touch with their mothers whilst distant from their homes. An African

---

<sup>93</sup> CO 533/510/16, Child Labour in Kenya, letter from W.E.Owen to the editor, New Statesman, 7th January, 1939.

mother, presumably, does not need to hear of her child for months on end. When they come back, many of them are sadly unamenable to parental and tribal discipline....Are we really satisfied that by employing children far distant from their homes in labour lines from the age of 12 we are discharging our trust worthily?<sup>94</sup>

Similar concerns and opposition to the employment of children at the age of twelve and fourteen were expressed by the British Trade Union Congress, which argued:

the minimum age has been raised to 12, but whilst this is improvement, we still feel that it is altogether wrong for young children to be taken into industry at this early age, especially at a great distance from their homes and in labour lines where the surrounding must be injurious to their mental and moral development. We must enter an emphatic protest against the employment of children of the age of 12 in such circumstances, and hope that as soon as may be the age will be reconsidered, and that moreover, this type of employment will immediately be restricted and as early as possible prohibited.<sup>95</sup>

Members of the African Clergy also protested against the employment of twelve year old children arguing:

We the African Clergy of the Native Anglican Church in Kavirondo, Kenya ... none of us could agree that Government is doing right in permitting children of twelve years to be taken far from their homes for many months to work in the labour lines.<sup>96</sup>

Owen supported the African clergy and argued that so long as the government of Kenya sanctioned the employment of twelve

---

<sup>94</sup> New Statesman, 7th January, 1939.

<sup>95</sup> CO 533/510/16, letter from Trade Union Congress to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Malcom MacDonald, 16th January, 1939.

<sup>96</sup> CO 533/510/16, child labour in Kenya: Native Clergy's protest in Manchester Guardian, 13th, March 1939.

year olds in labour lines far from homes, the labour position could not be regarded as satisfactory.

The Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society also joined the protests. Commenting on the Juveniles Committee's Report, the Society appealed to the Colonial Secretary "to consider the advisability of indicating that it is the intention of the government to secure 16 years as the minimum age for the industrial employment of children beyond the region of control of their homes and parents."<sup>97</sup> They too protested against the loss of parental control over children's labour, thus weakening family structures.

Similarly, parents protested against the employment of children away from their homes. Indeed, child labour migration increased the burden of work on women as it disturbed the gender division of labour in the family. Children's contribution within the household alleviated the burden of women's work. Child labour migration interfered with the socialization process which taught children to do household labour and as a result those who grew up without parental control often refused to participate when at home.

---

<sup>97</sup> Co 533/510/16, letter from Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society to the Under Secretary of State, 17th March, 1939. The Society noted that the committee based its recommendation of 12 years and 14 respectively by reference to the 1919 Convention, instead of the terms of the revised Convention of 1937 which raised the age to 15 years. Uganda, the Society argued, had raised the minimum age for industrial employment of children to 16 years.

Local leaders opposed child migrant labour. The Abaluhya Welfare association, for example, opposed the settlers' tendency to regard "Nyanza Province as a labour pool."<sup>98</sup> The Association added, "the North Nyanza Local Native Council should endeavour to issue instructions to the chiefs in the District that recruitment of juveniles is prohibited, and that anyone found practicing it privately will be liable to legal proceedings."<sup>99</sup> (For more details, see appendix C)

The accuracy and intensity of these complaints did little to change matters. The economic realities of the African reserves during the colonial period mitigated against easy solutions. Rural parents needed money to survive, and children could supply some of that.<sup>100</sup> Only the rich

---

<sup>98</sup> KNA, PC/NZA/2/20/26, letter from the Abaluhya Welfare Association, Eldoret Branch to the Secretary, North Nyanza Local Native Council, Kakamega, 22nd March, 1950.

<sup>99</sup> KNA, PC/NZA/2/20/26, letter from the Abaluhya Welfare Association Eldoret branch, 22nd March, 1950.

<sup>100</sup> This remains the case even today. International Labour Organisation (I.L.O), "Child Labour: The ILO perspective" Excerpt from the Report of the Director-General observed: "Children in the developing World, work out of necessity. Without their earnings, however small, the already low living standards of their families would be still lower. Large numbers of them do not even have families or cannot count on their families for support: they must rely on their own efforts. For many children in the developing World the chances of receiving serious education and training are minimal. The facilities are inadequate, the direct and indirect costs prohibitive and perhaps most discouragingly, the relevance and practical value of the education offered are doubted by parents and by the children themselves. Many drop out very early, and many more attend but only sporadically and without drawing much benefit." in Child Labour: A briefing Manual, (ILO, Geneva, 1986), p.8.



peasants could afford to send children to school, since fees were required. Where choices had to be made male children were chosen. Female children were expected to remain at home to contribute to the domestic household economy. Some of these girls entered wage labour. In poorer families both male and female children often entered wage labour as part of their families' survival strategies. But even when children accompanied their parents or guardians to a place of work, many children remained largely undisciplined because parental supervision was often mainly concerned with controlling children's cash earnings. As Orde Browne discovered in 1945:

There is, however, the objectionable feature that such children are very seldom in a position to control their own earnings and in consequence there is always the possibility of parents in the background who are living to a greater or less degree on the earnings of their offspring....The provision of the law which insists upon the children being accompanied by a parent or guardian is too often observed with a considerable measure of laxity, the guardian is frequently of a doubtful reliability in such a capacity, arousing suspicion that his supervision is restricted to the cash earned by the children.<sup>101</sup>

The traditional patriarchal control over children often became more an economic than a social preoccupation, leading to children's further alienation and indiscipline.

#### Failure of Labour Legislation, 1938-1956

---

<sup>101</sup> KNA, PC/NZA/2/20/26, Extract from the late Sir Granville Orde Browne's Report to the Secretary of State for the colonies on "Labour Conditions in East Africa" 22nd November, 1945.

That the East African Women's League (E.A.W.L) urges the Government to take more effective steps to implement the existing legislation to deal with the drift of native children from the Reserves and farms into Nairobi...although the employment of children under a certain age is illegal, a large number are employed, or live by petty pilfering or doing casual jobs, some very undesirable.<sup>102</sup>

The point is, legislation exists to prohibit the employment of juveniles under fourteen and to control vagrancy, but what use is legislation if there is no way of enforcing it? (Labour Commissioner)<sup>103</sup>

From 1938 on, attitudes in favour of reform of female and child labour developed. In fact, the colonial officials increasingly came to recognise the fact that the problem of female and child labour could not be solved by legislation alone. This was because of the increased demand for this labour, especially during the World War II period. As a result, the focus was to control the conditions and terms under which women and children worked in Kenya. Some colonial officials supported the use and employment of children in Kenya. Emphasizing the importance of children's labour, the District Commissioner for Central Nyanza stated: "at the moment, juvenile labour forms an important part in the economy

---

<sup>102</sup> KNA, Lab9/268, Re: Employment of Native "Totos" (children), letter from the E.A.W.L to the Chief Native Commissioner, copied to the Chief Labour Officer, Nairobi, 30th November, 1942. One of the chief objects of the League was, "to promote the welfare of women and children of all races throughout British East Africa and the British Empire by methods deemed desirable."

<sup>103</sup> KNA, Lab9/268, General: Juveniles, letter from Chief Labour Officer Nairobi to the Chief Secretary Nairobi, 9th December, 1942.

of the European estates especially so on the tea, coffee and pyrethrum estates seasonally"<sup>104</sup> Therefore, child labour was to be encouraged rather than suppressed. This view was strongly supported by settler farmers in Kenya.

In 1939 an ordinance which provided for the registration of juveniles in employment was put on the Statute Book. Ordinance No.16, issued as an amendment to the Employment of Servants Ordinance, 1937, prohibited the employment of children under twelve years except when a labour officer considered that, "a juvenile below such age can advantageously be employed and for whom no schooling is available he may issue a permit subject to the personal permission of the parent."<sup>105</sup> Similarly, the Ordinance stated that, before juveniles between the apparent ages of twelve and sixteen years could be employed they must obtain from his D.C a juvenile employment card, duly signed and with the consent of their parent or guardian. The child should have been medically examined and certified fit to do the work recruited for. Despite legislation stating that children under twelve years were to be exempted from all forms of employment, "male

---

<sup>104</sup> KNA, DC/KSM/1/17/27, letter from District Commissioner Central Kavirondo to Provincial Commissioner, Nyanza Province, 20/3/1945.

<sup>105</sup> KNA, DC/KSM/17/27, letter from Labour officer Nairobi to Labour officer Kisumu, 12/7/1941.

children between twelve and fourteen years of age were involved."<sup>106</sup> This legislation was not enforced at all until after 1954 for a variety of reasons. First, the under-capitalized settler farmers in Kenya relied mostly on cheap African labour: women and children constituted the most of this labour. Second, because of the powerful settler community in Kenya the colonial government took their views very seriously and handled them carefully. Third, the outbreak of World War II worsened the situation for the colonial government in Kenya, especially with war recruitment efforts, which led to labour shortages on settler plantations and the need for increased production to meet the war food requirements. All these complicated the situation for the colonial government and the implementation of the labour legislation on women and children.

In fact, it was not until 1941 that it was discovered that Ordinance No. 16 of 1939 had never been put into operation in Kenya. Stating the Governor's views on the failure to put into effect the 1939 Ordinance, Major Sir

---

<sup>106</sup> KNA, DC/KSM/17/27, 12/7/1941. A report from the Kenya Tea Growers Association observed that, "the present law is not operating satisfactorily in relation to the recruitment of juveniles because; (a) only 5 percent of the previous flow of recruited juveniles are presenting themselves for certificates; ... (c) despite the provisions of the law regarding certificates, it is known that a large number of juveniles circumvent the law (possibly juveniles whose parents have refused consent) and are reporting for employment, particularly to the Tea Estates." For details, see KNA, PC/NZA/2/20/26, Minutes of the Kenya Tea Growers Association, 3rd May, 1950.

Granville Orde Brown, the Labour Advisor to Colonial Office explained:

The food position would expose him to very great difficulties with the settlers, if he endeavoured to bring the whole Ordinance into operation, but rather grudgingly says that he would be prepared to introduce a measure abolishing penal sanctions for juveniles, if the Secretary of State feels strongly on the subject.<sup>107</sup>

Officials from the Colonial Office opposed the governor's decision and insisted on the implementation of Ordinance No. 16 of 1939. J.G.Hibbert observed:

I must ask for the matter to be referred to the Secretary of State, if necessary, since if it is discovered by our parliamentary critics (as it might be at any time) that an Ordinance passed three years ago, containing provision designed to give effect to an international labour convention, has never been brought into force, he will immediately become the target for severe criticism in the House of Commons, to which he will be able to return no convincing answer.<sup>108</sup>

The whipping of juveniles was a form of penal sanction which was particularly disliked by parliamentary critics. It was also repealed by the 1939 amendment Ordinance. Governor Moore noted that in practice whipping of juveniles was not applied by the courts. However, in response to the governor's suggestion, Orde Brown argued, "This would be a very poor defence, if the matter were raised in parliament, and in combination with the long delay that has already arisen, it

---

<sup>107</sup> CO 533/527, Correspondance between Major Granville Orde Brown and Mr. Seel, 27th Feb., 1943.

<sup>108</sup> CO 533/527, 27th Feb., 1943.

might place the Secretary of State in a most embarrassing position."<sup>109</sup> This legislation was not enforced at all throughout the colonial period.

The use of female and child labour intensified during the course of World War II when the demands to recruit women and girls to work on coffee plantations increased. Table 3 provides statistical information on the labour force engaged in agricultural wage labour on settler farms from 1941 - 1945.

Table 3

Total Number of Africans Working on Census Date, 1941-1945

Year	Men	Women	Children	Total
1941	267,339	16,429	58,895	233,602
1942	281,537	14,623	51,226	347,380
1943	287,793	27,465	64,288	378,546
1944	287,058	28,187	62,853	378,098
1945	294,999	28,356	55,931	379,286

Source: KNA, PC/NZA3/13/15 Report on Special Labour Census, 1941-1949 (Nairobi: Government printer, 1950).

As Table 3 illustrates, women were grossly under-represented in wage employment. By 1945, they constituted a mere 7.5 percent of the total agricultural wage labour force on settler farms, half the number of employed juveniles. Children's participation increased to significant levels

---

<sup>109</sup> CO 533/527, Letter from Granville Orde Brown to Governor of Kenya, Sir Henry Moore, 1st, March, 1943. In addition, A. Dawe concurred with Orde Brown and Hibbert and he too suggested, "this would leave the Secretary of State with no defence against a claim that the colonial office has left parliament under a misapprehension, and I think the Governor should be asked to deal with the position as regards juveniles at any rate" For details, see CO 533/527, 3rd March, 1943.

compared to the situation indicated in table 1. In 1941, a large number of children were listed under monthly paid labour.

However, in response to the critics of child employment in Kenya, in 1946 the governor appointed a commission whose terms of reference were as follows:

(i) To consider existing legislation in the colony relating to young persons and children; (ii) To advise upon the desirability or otherwise of the introduction of more modern and comprehensive legislation relating to young persons and children; and (iii) If the committee is of the opinion that more modern and comprehensive legislation is desirable, to advise the Governor as to the policy which should be incorporated in any such new legislation.<sup>110</sup>

The first committee which was appointed in 1946 did not take off. However, another committee was reconstituted by government notice No.728 of the 17th June, 1950 under the chairmanship of Mr.Humphrey Slade. Yet the recommendations of these official bodies were not carefully taken into consideration.

After World War II competition and demand for female and child labour intensified. Wealthy African peasant farmers were also employing labour to work on their farms. Hence, the demand for indigenous labour was great. Table 4 provides some of the figures on the labour force trend during the 1945-1948 period.

---

<sup>110</sup> KNA, Lab3/111, Employment of Women, Young Persons and Children, letter from governor, Circulated to all members of the Executive Council on the 30th March, 1946.

Table 4

Africans Employed, 1945-1948

Year	Registered Labourers			Resident Labourers			Daily Paid Casual		
	Men	Women	Child	Men	Women	Child	Men	Women	Child
1945	255,543	7,930	40,085	34,188	13,524	13,152	6,054	6,882	2,694
1946	248,386	11,133	43,568	31,137	14,045	7,855	7,862	9,577	3,469
1947	260,227	11,345	41,369	29,503	9,087	7,888	11,103	13,417	4,922
1948	272,464	13,859	35,412	27,914	8,739	6,697	9,696	8,991	2,795

Source: Report on African Labour Census, 1941-1949, Lab 9/351.

In the 1948 Labour Census Report, as illustrated by Table 5, the number of African employers is also indicated.

Table 5

African Employers of Labourers

African Employers	Males Employed	Females Employed	Juveniles Employed	Total
1 in Chania	6	---	2	8
12 in Elburgon	212	109	227	548
4 in Londiani	92	---	---	92
2 in Kakamega	25	31	12	68
19 Employers	335	140	241	716

Source: Report on African Labour Census, 1948, Lab 9/351

In the last part of the colonial period children were still being used as labourers in agriculture. In fact they continued to be employed in large numbers until the end of the 1950's. During the Mau Mau Emergency, female and child labour increased even more significantly.<sup>111</sup> Inspection of places

---

<sup>111</sup> Clayton and Savage Government and Labour in Kenya, pp. 355-357. During the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya, there were more children who were illegally employed because children were increasingly hired in place of adult male labour.



employing children was no longer possible during the state of emergency.

However the publication of the Slade Report coupled with increased pressure from the international community, led to changes in the employment of children. Indeed, as Slade reported, "had it not been for ... 'the almost terrifying pressure' exerted by the women's league, this report might never have seen the light of day."<sup>112</sup> As a result from 1954 to 1961 the proportion of children in the total labour force declined from seventeen to seven percent. A statement in the 1957 Department of Labour Annual Report confirmed:

From 1952 onwards, legislation on children's labour had been slowly adjusted, although it was not until 1956, some twenty years after the ILO convention on youth employment, that the Kenya legislation was brought into harmony with the ILO convention. In 1956 the amendments of the employment of women, young persons and children Act defined juveniles as anyone under eighteen years of age.<sup>113</sup>

Labour legislation on the employment of women and children was indistinguishable. Women and children were treated collectively under one legislation, (the employment of women, young persons and juveniles). Women were not treated as

---

<sup>112</sup> CO 859/457, Report on the Committee on Young Persons and Children, 1952 (Slade Report). Mr. Humphrey Slade, was the chairman of the committee. The objectives of the committee were to consider the existing legislation, and to advise government on policy and on the desirability of introducing new legislation.

<sup>113</sup> KNA: Labour Department, Annual Report, 1957, pp.23-24. For more information see also CO 859/191/10, letter from Rt. Hon. James Griffiths, M.P., Secretary of State for the Colonies to Governor, Kenya Colony.

mature adults. The employment figures for women and children between 1950-1956 are indicated in Table 7.

Table 7

Total Number of Women and Children Employed, 1950-1956

Year	Women	Children
1950	34,379	46,664
1951	41,402	43,613
1952	40,354	42,817
1953	49,561	43,994
1954	45,980	44,394
1955	64,335	43,642

Source: KNA, Labour Department, Annual Reports, (Nairobi, Government printer, 1949-1957).

The figures in Table 7 show the total number of women in agricultural and non-agricultural employment. However, Stichter has provided more statistical data on women in non-agricultural employment. Similarly, Kayongo-Male and P. Walji provide specific statistical data on children in agricultural employment.<sup>114</sup> It has been pointed out by Stichter that the bulk of female labour remained in self-employment in small-scale agriculture or enterprise, largely outside the growing modern or formal sector.<sup>115</sup> Thus self-employment also suggests that women continued to combine domestic household chores and at least some form of income-generating activity.

---

<sup>114</sup> D.Kayongo-male and P.Walji, Children and Work in Kenya, (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1984), p.49.

<sup>115</sup> Stichter, Migrant Labour in Kenya, p.60

In Kenya, until the mid-1950's the colonial government resisted all attempts by the British government (under ILO pressure) to implement conventions which Britain had adopted to pass minimum wage legislation. As a result wage differentials existed and persisted throughout the colonial period.

### Conclusion

Colonial labour policy and legislation in Kenya was not sufficiently enforced. As a result, it failed to provide adequate protection for female and child labour. Instead, labour legislation and legislative changes worked effectively to camouflage the exploitation of female and child labour. In addition, the co-existence of traditional gender division of labour and the new labour requirements which was regulated by colonial labour ordinances and circulars offered loopholes which provided justification for the colonial officials to avoid the enforcement of officially defined labour policy. This failure was always blamed on the traditional gender division of labour which was largely regulated by African customs. Obviously the loopholes created such a co-existence of labour, traditional and new labour legislation worked systematically to perpetuate the exploitation of female and child labour.

In this chapter, it was also noted that humanitarian organisations and missionary groups were involved in the campaign against forced labour issues in Kenya. Missionary groups were more outspoken in this campaign. While one can scarcely criticise the good missionaries for campaigning against compulsory unpaid labour, their campaign against women's wage labour displayed a tone of anti-feminism which is quite strong. Missionaries objection to the "independence" which such settings of wage labour seem to offer to women delayed their "independence" from male patriarchal control. Clearly, the missionary opposition to female and child labour was concerned largely with issues of sexual morality, a patriarchal concept of the Christian family and "discipline". This hardly contradicted the African patriarchal concepts which encouraged the exploitation of women.

In this chapter it has been stressed that female and child labour in settler production was not fairly remunerated. It was also noted that female and child labourers were underpaid, overworked, under-fed and were subjected to numerous immoral practices and harassment. This was particularly true for female labourers. Finally, the chapter emphasizes the fact that colonial labour legislation did not provide adequate safeguards to protect female and child labourers. Because of the strong settler influence in Kenya, labour legislation was not enforced despite the missionary and humanitarian pressure and influence both in Britain and Kenya.

It was also observed that the system of compulsory/forced communal labour was one of the strategies designed by the colonial officials to strengthen patriarchal authority and at the same time ensure maximum accumulation of capital by settler farmers through the use of cheap labour. Patriarchs as heads of households extended their control over female and child labour beyond the needs of the household. In addition, it was noted that women and children's participation in other forms of labour increased their burden as subsistence production in the rural areas continued to depend on their labour. This will be examined in detail in the next chapter.

#### Appendix A.

In another report, some of the children who were mentioned by W.E.Owen were interviewed. The statements made by these children were as follows:

- (1) Ongao s/o Matete (a boy of about 11 years of age); states: "I was at work throwing the earth. I went to help on my own. My father was away so I thought I ought."
- (2) Ogogo s/o Oyumbi (a boy of about 11 years of age); states: "I was present on the road. I heard that all were to turn out so I went. I did not work with a jembe [Swahili word for hoe] but threw the earth on one side."
- (3) Oluen s/o Anange (a boy of about 14 or 15 years); states: "The mlango (headman) said all were to go to work so I went. My father was on a journey to the doctor, he was back that day but lying down as his knee was bad. I considered it my duty to do my bit. I threw the earth only."
- (4) Odera s/o Owaur (a boy of about 14 years of age); states: "Habi is my uncle. I heard all were called out to work so I went. I had never worked on any occasion except this on a road. I cut grass with a jembe. The mlango arrived after Bwana (sir) Owen had passed."

Statements from the fathers or guardians of the four boys were as follows:

(1) Matete, states: "I was away when the mlango called. My son went because he saw I was away and someone in the village had to lend a hand."

(2) Oyumbi, states: "I was not present when mlango called and my son went on his own account."

(3) Unango, states: "My son went because he saw I had a bad knee. I went to the dispensary to get medicine for my knee. I have not the medical chit."

(4) Habi, states: "I was in Uyoma when the Mlango came round. My nephew who has no father went out to work as there was no one to lend a hand in the village and some one in the village must turn out, it is our idea of what is fair and it is customary for each village to put up some one."

The mlango concerned stated:

"I was not there myself but heard that Bwana Owen had written the names of some children down. Their fathers told them to go to work... The headman announced this in Baraza (public meeting). I told the male adults of my mlango to turn out. I told their fathers but their children turned up. I don't know why? I arrived at 11. a.m and gave all the children leave on the spot." ( For additional information see CO 533/386/12, letter from Governor, Kenya colony to the Secretary of State for the colonies, 28th September, 1929).

#### Appendix B.

The question of the compulsory use of girls for the collection of thatching material was also raised in the House of Commons by Rennie Smith (Labour, Penistone). The incident which this particular case referred to was as follows:

The charge is that a local chief {S.C [Senior Chief], official headman} illegally ordered gangs of girls to collect and carry thatching grass in his location. This charge is true. The facts are as follows:

The Local Native Council of Central Kavirondo District voted a sum of money for building certain rest houses for the accommodation of the elders of the tribe. The official headman concerned, chief Ogada undertook the erection of these buildings. Chief Ogada is a very prominent Headman, an adherent of the Church Missionary Society and Vice-President of the Kavirondo Taxpayers' Welfare Association of which Archdeacon Owen is the

President and there was every reason to believe that he could be entrusted to carry out the contract without oppressing his people. Unfortunately, however, it appeared that Ogada without the knowledge of the District Commissioner and in spite of the fact that he himself well knew that orders had been issued prohibiting the compulsion of women and girls to carry grass for the thatching of these rest houses. As soon as these illegal orders were brought to the knowledge of the District Commissioner, the latter immediately gave Ogada explicit instructions to pay off the women and to complete the work by paid male labour....

While there is no objection to women and children helping of their own free will in works for their own benefit they must not be ordered or compelled to do so. If women or children arrive in place of able-bodied males who have been lawfully called upon for any work they should be at once sent back by the officer or overseer in charge of the work and the defaulting males should be prosecuted. (For additional information, see CO 533/386/12, letter from Governor, Kenya colony to the Secretary of State for the colonies, 9th March, 1929, see also CO 533/386/12, letter from Open Door International to the Governor Kenya, 2nd August, 1929 and letter to the Secretary of State from Open Door International on the same issue dated, 8th February, 1930).

### Appendix C.

Parents complained about the state of indiscipline among children who worked and lived in labour lines. Children in labour lines smoked and drank excessively as the letter below from one parent explained:

Bwana - Nimeleta manung'uniko haya. Watoto wa miaka 10 au 12 hupelekwa kazini mwa wa wazungu wa mashamba na kwa matajiri wengine kwa kutaka wapagazi rahisi. Basi manung'uniko yangu ni haya. Hawa watoto watakapokuwa wakubwa huko mashambani watakuwa wamekulia ndani ya desturi mbaya yaani watakuwa wamekwisha kunakili desturi za watu wakubwa wa huko mashabani, desturi ya ulevi na wizi wakadhalika yaani yule bwana aliyewachukua kwa kazi hakuwachukua kwa kuwafunza adabu ila aliwachukulia kwa kazi yake maalum kama mjuavyo desturi za kihindi na adabu zao ndipo nimesema hivi - watoto hawa tabia zao hazitafaa pande zote kwa matajiri au kwa wazazi wao. Tabia zao zitakuwa machukizo maana wamekulia kwa adabu mbaya ndipo namwomba ninyi waafrika mnaofikiri kwa maisha yajayo, kwa

watoto hawa hasa kwa Labour Inspectors pamoja na ma D.C. Watoto hawa ingawa hupelekwa na malori katika mashamba ya Molo na mahali pengine nisipopajua, tafadhali komesheni kukusanya watoto wa miaka 12 kwa kazi isiyo na elimu tusije kulaumiwa mbele hivi waafrican wabya.

Source: KNA, Lab 3/54, Supply of Labour, letter from station master, Luanda, Bunyore to the Chief Secretary, Nairobi, 12th June, 1944.

Translation.

Sir, I have the following complaints. Ten or twelve year old children are taken to work for white settler farmers and for, some other rich people who want cheap labourers. The following are my complaints: when these children grow up on settler farms they grow under the bad influence of rustic and uncouth people with the habits of drunkenness and theft and the like because the white settler who takes them into forced labour will not do so in order to bring them up into well-behaved adults but rather in order that they may slave them, in the same way as they slave for Indians and their habits which make me say all this. These children's manners will not be worthy it neither to their employers nor to their parents. Their manners will be disturbing because they will have been brought up badly and that is why I am asking you Africans who think about the future, in relation to these children, Labour Inspectors and District Commissioners. Although the children are delivered to the farms in lorries, please stop picking twelve-year old children for work that has no education and training for them if we are not going to be accused of being bad Africans.



## CHAPTER SIX

### Women's Initiatives and Women Entrepreneurs in Rural Non-Farm Enterprises in Western Province in the 20th Century

Hitherto this study has concentrated on the role of women and children in the rural agricultural economy of Western Province as providers of labour for public works, subsistence farming and cash cropping. In those areas it has become evident that women were largely objects, disposed of and organised by forces either of the traditional or the new colonial economy which were controlled almost entirely by male patriarchs whether black or white, while even the efforts to remove abuses of their labour were the product of Christian patriarchal ideologies of the family, conceiving women as objects of protection. However, throughout these changes in the twentieth century, women were not only moved around as objects. There is a subjective history to examine as well. Women did respond to these situations with initiatives of their own. They developed entrepreneurial niches which they themselves controlled by exploiting opportunities which arose to acquire independent cash income. They were driven by strong motivations, to acquire land and independence and to invest in the education of their children. Many women made significant, if modest, changes to their conditions through such entrepreneurship. A few, whose careers will be examined towards the end of this chapter, became "big women" with

relatively substantial resources amassed through individual enterprise, shrewd investments and skilled judgement.

Women, however, did not embark on these enterprises in a model textbook economy of "a level playing field". Undoubtedly the main agent for social change created by the colonial regime was that of western education and schooling. Offered by the missions for the purpose of religious conversion, the products of mission schools could use their literacy and numeracy as virtually the sole route to escape lowly status at birth, lack of access to land, or the sheer drudgery of rural agricultural labour. Government absorbed the mission school literates into positions as junior clerical workers, railway employees, soldiers and policemen; trading companies needed clerks and salesmen; even the missions themselves absorbed their own products as teachers, catechists, printers and ancilliary workers. Why could not women have escaped up the social ladder by a similar process? However the educational system, limited as it was, was skewed by an intense bias towards the education of males; a bias made more powerful by the fact that it was shared by African traditional patriarchal norms as well as by the colonial school system itself. The disfavouring of female education was slowly eroded over the decades. Nevertheless its effect was to exclude women, until comparatively recent times, from the slow development of an African skilled working class, the

clerical petit bourgeoisie and the salaried professionals who emerged in late colonial times.

Largely excluded from educational opportunity until late colonial times, women in Western Province therefore had to devise different strategies with what lay to hand. In their agricultural and rural economy they had to use farm products and begin non-farm activities which could be carried on in or near the home and be compatible with women's reproductive responsibilities. Children were generally utilised as labour in these enterprises, thus turning responsibility into an asset. Taking advantage of improved communications and transport, and the development of open markets, women became petty entrepreneurs. They often processed materials first in handicraft industries, pottery making, basket weaving and most profitable of all brewing beer, but then brought these products to market, together with surplus food crops, cooked food, firewood, second hand clothing or whatever would sell. Many women built on to these activities arrangements with Indian traders to sell imported goods in tiny packages. The significance of these activities was that they were largely independent of male control; profits were kept and invested by the women, who operated as independent subjects. Unlike certain areas in West Africa, however, women in Western Province did not dominate these non-farm activities, rather, they competed with men, who were in the majority in marketing

activities. Women entrepreneurs had to carve out their niche by their own competitiveness and enterprise.

### Female Education in Kenya in the 20th Century

The development of schooling in Kenya was bound up inextricably with missionary work.<sup>1</sup> When the Kenya and Uganda railway line opened at the turn of the century, the movement of the missionaries inland was swift, enthusiastic and widespread.<sup>2</sup> By the beginning of World War I, missionaries had established some thirty-two schools and mission stations.<sup>3</sup> There were five stations and schools in Western Province but only one school at Kaimoisi had a separate section which was specifically devoted to girls education.<sup>4</sup> The efforts slowed down during the war years, but picked up again with another

---

<sup>1</sup> J.N.B.Osogo, "Educational Development in Kenya 1911-1924 with particular reference to African Education" in B.A.Ogot (ed.), Hadith 3, (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1971), p.103.

<sup>2</sup> R.Oliver, The Missionary Factor in East Africa, (London: Longmann, 1968), pp.168-169.

<sup>3</sup> In Kenya, the first government African school was built in Kitui in 1909, which enrolled boys only and in very small numbers. In 1925, the first government girls' school was built in Mombasa but did not enroll Africans. Education was organised on racial as well as gender lines. For details, see ROK, Women of Kenya: A Review and Evaluation of Progress, (Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1985), p.8.

<sup>4</sup> KNA, CCEA, 404, E5 Education Department, Education of women and girls in Kenya, 1916-1935, see section on Kaimosi school.

twenty schools being established between 1920 to 1927.<sup>5</sup> Girls Boarding schools increased from one (Kaimoisi) to four by 1930. All girls schools were organised and managed by missionaries such as the Protestant, Catholics and Anglican (C.M.S) churches.

The African reaction to early missionary education was initially one of suspicion and rejection. However, during the 1920s and 1930s, it changed slowly to acceptance and thereafter to eager and clamorous demand which exceeded the capacity of the mission churches or the colonial government.<sup>6</sup> But education for girls was not a priority issue for missionaries or government officials. The number of girls schools was low (only 4) compared to boys schools. Of course there were co-educational schools which were organised and managed by African District Educational Boards and Independent African schools a phenomenon which increased significantly in the 1930s onwards. The fees in these mixed schools was cheap, but parents were reluctant to allow their daughters to go to those institutions.

Several factors contributed to the lack of interest in girls' education. First was the socio-cultural considerations. In traditional societies, education was informal, oral and pragmatic. Children learned not by

---

<sup>5</sup> Osogo, "Educational Development in Kenya" p.103.

<sup>6</sup> For more information on African education, see J.Anderson, The Struggle for Education, (London: Longmann, 1970).

attending school, but by observing and participating in the life of the community. However, the introduction of modern education changed this considerably. But, parental attitudes about girls' education did not keep pace with modern concepts of education. Indeed, when Western education was introduced, women were not the first to be allowed the "privilege" of going to school. Parents, particularly female relatives of girls, were afraid of European education. They were not willing to put their daughters under the protection of a man and even worse, to allow them to go to school together with boys. This was regarded as a breach of cultural norms. Moreover mothers needed girls to help them at home,<sup>7</sup> because women and girls bore the brunt of production in the homestead. It has been noted earlier that boys especially after the age of ten performed a declining amount of agricultural and domestic labour, while that of girls steadily increased in the traditional society. The absence of boys therefore was less harmful to production. The girls learnt life's duties through actual participation and school would break that continuity. Hence, parents resented any interference with these essential duties.

---

<sup>7</sup> This compares very well with the observations made by Robertson in Ghana. Robertson noted that, "the girls were needed at home for domestic duties and trading... The single most important reason for not being sent to school or having to drop out (cited by 36% of the women in the 1971-72 small survey) was helping their mothers or other relatives." See Robertson, Sharing the Same Bowl, pp.138-139.

Finally, girls were intended for marriage and consequently parents would not benefit from investment in their education, as they would from that of the boys, whose higher training might earn more money for the family.<sup>8</sup> The dominant patriarchal cultural attitudes in Kenyan societies reinforced this factor. Elders argued that once a girl was married she became the "property of her husband" and therefore even if she was taken to school and as a result increased her subsequent earning power as Enock Mukhwana reported, "that money would legitimately belong to her husband".<sup>9</sup>

Additionally, the traditional system of bridewealth payments did not distinguish between uneducated and educated girls until the 1960s.<sup>10</sup> Therefore educated girls seemed to

---

<sup>8</sup> Rural parents have been unwilling to invest in their daughters' education because they consider such an investment wasteful or frivolous. For a more insightful analysis, see Albert Maleche, "A New Status for Women in Kenya" in East African Journal, June, 1972. Similarly, a study by the World Bank in Kenya further noted that, "for rural families, sending daughters to school implies a greater opportunity cost in terms of foregone contribution to the farm and home. ...parents have lower occupational aspirations for their daughters than for their sons, even in the higher socio-economic groups, and even when the daughters' performance in school is superior to that of sons." For details, see World Bank, Kenya: Population and Development, (Washington D.C: The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and The World Bank, 1983), p.159.

<sup>9</sup> Enock Mukhwana, Oral interview, Bungoma, 1988.

<sup>10</sup> In the 1960s, a new development emerged whereby the girls' level of education determined the pride-wealth to be paid by the family of her husband. However, educated women have been increasingly protesting against this and any other form of pride-wealth system. Women are not a form of property

cause a financial loss to their fathers if girls' bridewealth was valued in cattle. Educating girls, parents argued, was not therefore a useful form of investment. Nothing demonstrated so consistently the traditional belief in individuals as property as the attitude to education. Females were designated as the ultimate property of another family, while males were property belonging for all time to the lineage into which they were born.

It is likely that preference for investment in schooling for boys was related to the patrilineal descent systems in which inheritance passed through the male line. In this system, sons retained the responsibility and provided care for their parents in old age, while daughters were incorporated into their husbands' families. The link between education and employment in the colonial economic system meant that African peoples quite logically decided it was more important to guarantee males the better prospects for wage jobs in the formal sector. As a result most families put educating sons ahead of daughters.

The colonial government did not attempt to offset African reluctance by encouraging girls' education. Education of girls was entirely the responsibility of mission churches. However, the colonial government established boys schools in the country. There were three such schools in Western

---

to be valued like any other commodity.



Province. There were none for girls until the 1960s. One education report succinctly stated:

The little which has been achieved in the education of African women and girls is almost entirely the result of their far-sighted efforts (various missions-Protestants and Catholic). The state has done little to supervise or coordinate the work.<sup>11</sup>

Clearly, government efforts towards the development of girls education and institutions of learning were reduced to provision of limited funds which were not adequate to maintain the daily operations of these schools. The Church Missionary Society, which participated in the development of girls' education reported that:

the girls' schools were more or less shelters of refuge where girls could come to escape persecution by relatives. There were a number of small girls who wanted protection from cultural initiation rites, and there were older girls who were threatened with marriage into polygamous households.<sup>12</sup>

Girls schools played twin functions; they protected them from cultural persecution and provided literacy awareness.

In 1931, a new phase developed, characterized by more concern for the education of girls.<sup>13</sup> The government began to support it. In June 1935, the Advisory Council on African

---

<sup>11</sup> KNA, File No. CCEA, 404, E7 Education Department. Education of women and girls in Kenya, 1947-1949, p.2.

<sup>12</sup> D.W.Furley and T.Walson, A History of Education in East Africa, (New York: Nok Publishers, 1978), p.169.

<sup>13</sup> KNA, Native Affairs Department, Annual Report, 1931.

education,<sup>14</sup> met and discussed "the need for additional grants-in-aid for girls schools."<sup>15</sup> This concern to develop girls' education came out of a realisation that economic development would require the establishment of literacy awareness in "progressive" reserves.<sup>16</sup> Second, the development of independent African schools encouraged and illustrated to the colonial government the fact that Kenyan Africans were ready to accept changes initiated through formal education. It was noted that development and progress were seriously handicapped unless girls received education as well as boys.<sup>17</sup>

But above all, the rationale for girls' education in the 1930s had been better preparation for motherhood and wifedom. The basis for this new demand was the fact that the "new" class of educated African men needed to have literate wives, whose values and concepts of motherhood and hygiene reflected Victorian standards. This was evident from the subjects which

---

<sup>14</sup> This was a body of appointed officials which assessed the educational needs of Africans in each district. The Advisory Council consisted of African elders, church representatives with the District Commissioner as the chairman.

<sup>15</sup> KNA, NAD, Annual Report, 1935.

<sup>16</sup> The colonial government had the tendency of classifying African reserves on the basis of their ability to accept and integrate new ideas in their daily activities. Used in this context, "progressive" reserves were the ones which showed some willingness to abandon their traditional values and were ready to accept changes in all spheres of their life.

<sup>17</sup> KNA, North Kavirondo District Annual Report, 1935.

were taught to girls in schools. Programmes which were designed specifically emphasized western-oriented domestic science rather than agriculture. The curriculum was not changed to reflect the needs of Kenyan women. Consequently, the education of girls was not always immediately relevant to the enhancement of opportunities within the modern economy. Educated women were obviously intended to serve the needs of educated men.

By 1936 there were over 1500 schools in operation over the whole of Kenya (see table 1) enrolling over 100,000 pupils (Table 2). There there were three government aided boys

Table 1

Government schools	Schools which received grants-in-aid	Unaided schools	Total number of schools
51	353	1,101	1,505

Source: KNA, Native Affairs Department, Annual Report 1936.

schools in Western Province (Bungoma, Kakamega and Musingu). There were no government aided school for girls in the province. There were however five girls' schools which received grants-in-aid in Western Province. Unaided schools were also co-educational institutions. Table 2 indicates the number of pupils who were in school by 1936 in the whole colony.

Table 2

Males	Females	Increase over the previous year	Total number of pupils in school
69,000	31,218	Of the 4,000 additional pupils, 874 were girls	100,218

Source: KNA, NAD, Annual Report, 1936.

The breakdown was as follows:

	<u>Boys</u>	<u>Girls</u>
Elementary education:	96.77% - 6-8 yrs	7-10 yrs
Primary education:	3.05% - 9-16 "	11-18 "
Secondary education:	0.18% - 17-21 "	19-23 "

The figures in table 2 represent only 12.5% of African children of school age at that time.<sup>18</sup> Girls started school late as indicated in table 2. Certainly the attitude of parents militated against girls' entry into modern education.

Another report submitted by the inspector of schools for Nyanza in 1942, indicated the number of African girls at school in North and Central Kavirondo. Table 3 provides figures for the enrolment of girls in schools in Nyanza Province. Yet in 1942, education grants to mission schools for Africans totalled £ 48,096. Of this amount, only £10,426 or 21 per cent was allocated to the education of women and girls.<sup>19</sup> Most girls schools were boarding institutions and therefore required more funds to operate efficiently and

<sup>18</sup> KNA, NAD, Annual Report 1936, p.53.

<sup>19</sup> KNA, Ibid.,

effectively. Low funding also meant that fewer girls could be admitted to these institutions of learning.

Table 3

African Girls at School in 1942

North Kavirondo		Central Kavirondo	
Sub-Std. A	1,484	Sub-Std. A	1,722
Sub-Std. B	557	Sub-Std. B	416
Std. 1	399	Std. 1	315
Std. II	244	Std. II	148
Std. III	171	Std. III	55
Total	2,855		2,656

Source: CCEA 404:E7 Education Department, Education of women and girls in Kenya, 1942-1949.

Of the above total of girls in schools in Nyanza Province indicated in table 3, only 19 girls from three girls' Boarding schools sat the common entrance primary examination which was normal after standard IV. This table further reinforces the argument that the participation of girls in education was very low. Furthermore, those girls who attended school did not for a long period. Drop-outs occurred because of non-payment of school fees and since most of the girls were mature (marriageable age) they became married before completion. For girls, the usual difficulties were aggravated by the fact that few of them were prepared to remain unmarried for long periods after they matured. As one informant remarked, "sometimes, girls got married at a very early age, and this usually put a

premature end to their education."<sup>20</sup> This problem was exacerbated by the usual late start in education combined with their early maturity as compared with boys and the tradition that women married ten or more years earlier than men. The social pressure on women to marry early and bear children immediately was probably the most oppressive expression of patriarchal norms in the society.

Moreover, organisations which helped boys pay their fees usually ignored girls. Societies which formed during the colonial period, such as the Abaluhya Welfare Association, were not concerned with promoting education for girls.<sup>21</sup> This association promoted and supported boys' education, apart from other issues. For example, it paid school fees for those male students whose parents were unable to. However, the association did not do the same for girls. Female students were not awarded scholarships by the association. Clearly, education for girls was not taken seriously by the association.

In fact, in 1952 out of a total of 851 educational institutions in Western Province, only 4 were for females and twenty-five were co-educational (intermediate schools).<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> Nuhu Kitanyi, Oral interview, Bungoma, 1988.

<sup>21</sup> KNA, DC/NN/10/3, Political Associations, 1948.

<sup>22</sup> Intermediate schools were from standard five to standard eight. To graduate to the Intermediate school, pupils had to pass the Common Entrance Examination (CEE) which was a regional examination for all African pupils in East Africa.

Indeed the continued growth of many co-educational schools gradually produced a change in attitude, and the colonial government also endeavoured to promote girls' education. The more elite families, in particular, began to support women's education which led to some improvement in girls' participation in western education. Table 4 provides details on these institutions.

Table 4

Educational Institutions in Western Province in 1952

T3 Teacher Training Centres	-	5
T4 Teacher Training Centres	-	5
Trades and Technical School	-	1
Secondary schools (Boys)	-	2
Junior Secondary Schools (Boys)	-	12
Junior Secondary schools (Girls)	-	4
Intermediate schools (Mixed)	-	25
Intermediate schools (girls)	-	4
Intermediate schools (Boys)	-	13
Primary schools (Aided)	-	245
Primary schools (Unaided)	-	533
-----		
Total		855
-----		

Source: DC/NN/1/33-34, North Nyanza Annual Reports, 1951-52.<sup>23</sup>

In table 4, all teacher training centres were co-educational institutions, with a few exceptions like agricultural colleges, trades and technical schools and colleges which were for boys only. There were more boys' than girls' schools. By 1952, Junior secondary schools included standards five and six. But, by 1954, there were fifty-two intermediate schools

---

<sup>23</sup> CCEA 632, African Education, Western Regional Education Board 1951-53, pp.12-15.

in the province. This included four girls' boarding schools, two boys' boarding schools and forty-three day intermediate schools. The increased number of co-educational school certainly facilitated girls' participation in these schools. However, such schools had their own unique problems which also led to high drop out rates for girls. Certainly the high drop out rates by girls as a result of early pregnancy was one of the problems which worked to their detriment. Table 5 shows the estimated child population in Kenya by 1955.

Table 5

## Estimated Child Population in Kenya in 1955

Number of Boys	Number of Girls	Percentage of boys attending school	Percentage of Girls attending schools	Total number of schools
384,000	372,000	67%	23.6%	3,050

Source: Department of Education, North Nyanza District Annual Report, 1955.

Table 6 provides figures to show the number of schools in Kenya in 1955.



Table 6

Number of Schools in Kenya in 1955

Primary Day Schools	Intermediate Day Mixed	Intermediate Boarding Schools for Boys	Intermediate Boarding Schools for Girls	Secondary schools for Boys	Secondary schools for Girls
3,050	332	9	33	19	2

Source: Department of Education, North Nyanza District Annual Report, 1955.

There were more boarding schools for girls as indicated in table 6, but not many girls went to these schools because they cost more than day schools. Furthermore, parents were not prepared to spend a lot of money on the education of girls. Although there were distinct signs of improvement of girls' education and attendance of schools, table 7 shows that the enrolment of girls was still far below that of boys, but at the same time an improvement over the 1930s and 1940s. In fact table 7 show significant improvements in the enrolment of girls in schools.

Table 7

The Enrolment of Boys and Girls in Schools in Kenya, 1955-1960

Year	Pri. Boys	Pri. Girls	Interm Boys	Interm Girls	Sec. Boys	Sec. Girls
1955	256,876	87,662	39,892	8,449	2,024	143
1956	282,591	107,127	44,200	9,946	2,360	226
1957	315,807	125,111	47,646	11,702	2,798	336
1958	370,124	160,211	56,752	14,323	3,507	415
1959	397,929	181,261	70,047	17,868	4,280	614
1960	415,853	203,315	86,231	21,493	4,623	786

Source: Department of Education, Annual Reports 1955-1961.

About two-thirds of the primary total of enrolment were boys. The enrolment of girls in schools was increasing, but the number of girls who managed to survive until secondary school was very low compared to boys. Girls were not expected to go far in education.

Certain socio-cultural factors militated against girls taking full advantage of the educational opportunities which were open to them. The rate at which girls dropped out of school was very high. In addition, girls performed very poorly in school examinations. There were a number of factors which contributed to this. Parents realized that education had some value which could benefit girls as well as boys. First, girls did not have any extra time to prepare for their examinations. Second, English was introduced late to the Africans and yet all examinations were set and written in

English. Therefore, most Africans could barely pass. Boys had extra time to read story books written in English and to improve both their written and spoken language. Girls did not enjoy this opportunity, especially those from poor families. In some cases, school fees for girls were late, and after they had wasted a good number of weeks at home, catching up in school work was usually a problem. As a result, girls performed poorly in national and regional school examinations. Female participation and enrolment at all levels of education increased considerably after independence. Female enrolment for primary schools rose from 32 per cent in 1960 to 35 per cent in 1964 to 45.6 per cent in 1975 and to 48.2 per cent in 1984.<sup>24</sup> In 1974, the government abolished school fees for standard one to four. By 1978, school fees had been removed from the entire primary cycle. However, this so called free primary education was an illusion. In fact, as a result of the introduction of this free primary education, education has become extremely expensive for most poor rural households in

---

<sup>24</sup> ROK, Women of Kenya: Review and Evaluation of Progress, (Nairobi, Kenya Literature Bureau, 1985), pp.8-22. See also G.E.Eshiwani, "Women's Access to Higher Education in Kenya: A study of Opportunities and Attainment in Science and Mathematics Education" in The Journal of Eastern African Research and Development, Vol.15, 1985, pp.91-110. Indeed, as the ILO mission to Kenya in 1972 observed, "women generally have had less access to the schools in Kenya than have men. In 1969, over 90 per cent of women above 40 years of age had never been to school; nor had over 75 per cent of women aged 25-40. Even in the 10-24 age group, less than 50 per cent of females had any schooling and less than 25 per cent had completed more than standard 4, often considered a minimum for permanent literacy." For details, see ILO, Employment, Incomes and Equality, p.296.

Western Province in particular and Kenya in general. The government simply transferred the cost of primary education to parents. This is evident at three levels. Parents must purchase uniforms, contribute towards building funds and buy expensive texts and supplies. As a result, education has become too expensive for the poor in this "era of free education."

In secondary schools, female students increased from 30 per cent in 1964 to 35.9 per cent in 1975 and to 40.7 per cent in 1984.<sup>25</sup> Enrolment at the university level rose from 16.1 per cent in 1968 to 17.6 per cent in 1976 and to 30.3 per cent in 1984/85.<sup>26</sup> Commenting on the participation of women in secondary education, a study Women of Kenya observed:

The proportions of girls enrolling for secondary education are low when compared to those enrolling for primary school education and completing standard seven. The reasons for this trend are first, the average cost of educating a girl in Kenya are higher than that for educating a boy. Given the low average family incomes, a lot of girls miss attending secondary education due to parental financial constraints. A second reason

---

<sup>25</sup> In addition the ILO mission to Kenya in 1972 noted that, "although girls' enrolment in secondary schools is growing at a rate higher than that of boys, their survival rate in the education system is low. For example, of 5,100 girls who enrolled in form 1 in 1965, only 71.5 per cent entered form 4 in 1968, as against 78.5 per cent of boys. A higher proportion of drop-outs among girls is also noticeable at higher school certificate level." For analysis, see ILO, Employment, Incomes and Equality, p.297.

<sup>26</sup> ROK, Women of Kenya, pp. 8-22. The ILO mission to Kenya in 1972 adds, "the percentage of girls in the sixth form in the 1965-70 period was between 19 and 20 per cent." See ILO, Employment, incomes and equality, p.297.

arises from the relative shortage of secondary school facilities for girls as compared to boys.<sup>27</sup>

Schooling has perpetuated both the myth of women's inferiority and helped to transform that myth into reality. Both traditional and English cultures have considered women inferior to men. Traditional African patriarchy had been initially reluctant to educate women at all. As that attitude declined, other norms such as early marriage prevented the success of women in education. Thus while traditional patriarchy seemed to bend to demand, it nevertheless maintained its dominance over the final result. As the girls came into schools, European patriarchy took charge and often streamed girls into subjects which prepared them as wives according to white ideas. This may explain why traditional patriarchy began to slowly give in to female demand since Europeans professed to be upholding the male standards both believed in. What education women received, did not prepare them for either wage employment or as independent entrepreneurs. Both black and white patriarchal structures might have frowned upon such a development. Women's failure to acquire formal education inhibited their ability to compete

---

<sup>27</sup> ROK, Women of Kenya, p.11. In addition, the study suggests that the increase in the number of child enrolment for primary education is due to the free primary education. This illusion of free education has in fact made education more expensive by transferring the cost to the parents. As a result, children from rural poor households cannot afford to raise the various building and development funds imposed by the Parents and Teachers' Associations under the guidance of school boards.

with men for modern wage employment and therefore strengthened the myth of their inferior status in society. Clearly patriarchy and its determination of what women should do and shall not was the main cause of women's backwardness.

Women's education did not begin to move rapidly until after the 1960's when young males began to demand and be willing to pay extra bridewealth for western educated wives. The emerging male patriarchy was gradually coming to understand the financial advantages of a wife who could be expected to contribute income to the family. At the same time the government and developers were seeing that in other countries of the world, an educated female labour force could be a source of cheap labour for occupations once dominated by males. Thus over twenty years formal sector employment rose from about 12% in 1964 to almost 20% in 1985.<sup>28</sup> Thus the demands of the young patriarchy combined with the long term strategy of government to place more stress on women's education in the 1960's which would be exactly like that offered to males. The young patriarchy relied upon the immense ~~social pressure~~ for early marriage and many children as devices of control over the new educated female.

---

<sup>28</sup> ROK, Employment and Earnings in the Modern sector, 1963-1967, and 1968-1970, see also Economic Survey 1986, (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1987). See also P.T.Zeleza, "Women and the Labour Force in Kenya since Independence" in the Transafrican Journal of History, Vol. 17, 1988, pp.69-107.

Women's Non-Farm Sector Enterprises in Western Province  
During the Colonial Period

Those regions where women dominate the food trade of rural and urban markets are usually the regions characterized by female farming traditions. Conversely, in the regions where we find market trade dominated by men, we also find that men do most of the of the agricultural work, while women give only occasional help.<sup>29</sup>

One survival strategy which women found extremely useful was participation in rural non-farm sector activities.

The establishment of modern markets linked up the traditional trade with modern commercial patterns.<sup>30</sup> Markets were

---

<sup>29</sup> E.Boserup, Woman's Role in Economic Development, (London: Earthscan Publications Ltd., 1989), p.91. In addition, Boserup explained that, market trade has come into women's hands in some regions because women are actively engaged in producing the crops, and particularly when they are farmers on their own account. The products sold by women in this case are primarily agricultural products, fruits, vegetables, milk, eggs and poultry.

<sup>30</sup> Market and market place in many places have been used more or less synonymous with that of "trading centre" in Kenya. However, the three, refer to different aspects of the internal market system. Trading centres were created by the colonial regime to "integrate the African subsistence economy into the colonial mercantile network". For details, see P.A.Memon, "Some Geographical Aspects of the History of Urban Development in Kenya" in B.A.Ogot (ed), Economic and Social History of East Africa, Hadith 5, (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1975), p.131. Kongsted and Monsted add that markets were, "to stimulate the production of saleable crops in the African reserves", see Family, Labour and Trade, p.97. Uzoigwe adds that markets in pre-colonial East Africa did also function within more complex socio-political relationships such as the royal markets of the kingdoms bordering Lake Victoria, or the frontier markets established to channel economic exchange between different political regions. For details, see U.N.Uzoigwe, "Pre-colonial Markets in Bunyore-Kitara" in B.A.Ogot (ed), Economic and Social History of East Africa Hadith 5, (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1975), p.164.

elements of the pre-colonial social and economic life where people gathered in certain places at various intervals to exchange use-values, such as grain for tools.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, as Freeman and Norcliffe noted:

pre-colonial societies in eastern Africa did not merely practice subsistence agriculture. Nonfarm activities were also in evidence, including metal working, craft industries, and the gathering of forest products. The output of these activities, and of agriculture entered into two types of trade; sporadic periodic barter markets involving exchange within a tribe, or between neighbouring tribes, and long-distance inter-tribal trade focused on the Arabs-Swahili port cities of the coast. The latter was a fore-runner of the trading system that developed in the colonial era.<sup>32</sup>

Women's participation in commercial activities took a new turn in 1920s. This period witnessed the expansion of regulated open-air markets where women came to play a key role in non-farm sector activities and trade.<sup>33</sup> Open-air markets were established in Western Province in the 1920s. Open-air

---

<sup>31</sup> Donald B. Freeman and Glen B. Norcliffe notes, "many open-air market places that predate the colonial period attracted clusters of Asian, Swahili or African dukas during the colonial period. Many others were artifacts of colonialism." For details, see Freeman and Norcliffe, Rural Enterprise in Kenya, p.30.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>33</sup> For details on women's market activities, Boserup adds, "the fact that nearly all women in some communities trade in the market, although most of them derive very little income from it, is more understandable if it is remembered that these women, most of them illiterate, have few alternative opportunities for earning. Moreover, for many women the daily visits to the market, where they spend much of the time chatting with neighbours while waiting for customers is ... preferable to the hard work they would have to do if they were farming instead of trading. For more information see Boserup, Woman's Role in Economic Development, p.93.



markets were established by local communities, were managed by elders and in the colonial period they were first controlled by chiefs, but in the mid-thirties the control of these markets was transferred by the government to the African District Councils.<sup>34</sup> In Western Province, the first open-air market was held in 1926 at Watoya in the present Mumias division. Most of them were established close to market centres, which were dominated by Indian traders. The expansion of open-air markets therefore facilitated women's participation in local and national trading activities. Women constituted the majority of the open-air market-using population.

The dominant role of women in market activity reflected the continuity of a practice developed to solve problems of food insecurity in the pre-colonial period. In fact, markets were concentrated in areas of high agricultural output. This supports L.J.Wood's observation that the predominance of women in market trade also reflected an extension of the women's traditional concern and responsibility for the supply of basic

---

<sup>34</sup> Open-air markets were held in open spaces where there were no shops. However in some places, open-air markets were held near market centres. Open-air markets were held once or twice in a week, whereas market centres with regular shops which operated either retail or wholesale stores operated daily. Freeman and Norcliffe adds that open-air markets are periodic i.e do not operate at the same level of activity daily and are not composed predominantly of permanent enterprises. For details, see Freeman and Norcliffe, Rural Enterprise in Kenya, pp.31-39.

foodstuffs.<sup>35</sup> It also helps to explain the nature of the commodities sold at different market centres, most of which were foodstuffs.

In Western Province, the discovery of gold in Kakamega in 1934 worked as an eye-opener to the women in the region. During the short period of the gold-mining rush, women started to sell a variety of cooked foodstuffs to the mine-workers.<sup>36</sup> The most popular foodstuffs included porridge, boiled maize and beans, cassava and sweet potatoes. They also sold eggs and poultry. In fact among the Abaluhya of Western Province, the only form of property which was traditionally regarded as women's was poultry and poultry products. Although women were not allowed to eat chicken and poultry products, they could sell them. They also controlled the cash earned through the sale of poultry and poultry products.

In 1945, the Maize and Produce Control Board formed Poultry Keepers' Co-operatives to encourage the collection and delivery of eggs to inspection centres. Indeed, as H.Fearn correctly stated:

---

<sup>35</sup> J.L.Wood, "Pre-colonial Markets in East Africa" Journal of Geographical Association of Nigeria, Vol.17, no.1, June 1974.

<sup>36</sup> Jean Hay for instance notes: "D. K. Williams' "Kiboko mines" employed several hundred persons and regularly bought milk, produce, chickens, and prepared foods from the women of Kowe." M. J. Hay, "Economic Change in Luoland: Kowe, 1890-1945" Ph.D thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1972, p. 192. This was also true about the situation in Kakamega during the gold mining rush.

Eggs Circles were organized by the Maize and Produce Control. These egg circles were organized on a co-operative basis as a supplementary marketing organization which the Produce Control called the "Nyanza Egg Service." They bought eggs and sold them in Nairobi and Mombasa; and contract to the armed forces.<sup>37</sup>

Fearn aptly adds, " the members of these societies were women, while a man acted as secretary and dealt with the marketing of the eggs at the society level."<sup>38</sup> Women constituted the majority of the members because they owned poultry and poultry products. Fearn adds, " it was mainly the womenfolk who brought eggs to market."<sup>39</sup> But, a man was employed to handle the eggs at the collection centre. Table 8 provides data on the number of eggs exported from Western Province in 1940 and from 1944-1946.

But, the price of eggs was also very low compared to milk and other farm products like maize, so one had to have many hens to realise a reasonable income. Small wonder that Indians and Europeans did not participate in this egg business

---

<sup>37</sup> H.Fearn, An African Economy: A Study of the Economic Development of Nyanza Province of Kenya, 1903-1953, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1961), p.212. In all, some sixty-six societies were registered under the co-operative societies Ordinance, 1945, but by 1953 only twenty remained on the register and these were not operating.(p.212)

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p.212.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p.212. Indeed, Fearn suggests very strongly that, "in the co-operative venture, economic success has been entirely dependent upon the work of the womenfolk, though their husbands were the members of the societies and their committees." See pp.211-212.

at all because of the low market value. Furthermore, these

Table 8

Monthly Egg Return from Western Province, 1940 and 1944-1946

Year	Month	Eggs Exported	Cost per Egg	Total Value £
1940	Jan-Dec	322,500	@ 3 Cents	9,675.00
1944	Jan-Dec	320,600	@ 6 Cents	19,236.00
1945	Jan-Dec	1,439,950	@ 6 Cents	86,397.00
1946	Jan-Dec	747,671	@ 6 Cents	44,850.00

Source: KNA, Agr.5/45/2, 1949. Poultry: Egg Industry and Legislation, PC/NZA/3/2/164, Poultry and Poultry Farming, Department of Agriculture, Kakamega, 1940-1945, p.2.

eggs were graded so that the lower the grade of eggs, the lower the cost. Consequently the money earned from the sale of eggs was not enough to enable women to meet their most immediate felt needs, such as buying utensils, salt, paying school fees and buying uniforms for their children.

As Fearn argued, these co-operatives often failed as a result of the variable price for eggs and dishonest grading.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, he added:

The system of collection, whereby the secretary of the 'egg circle' collected and marketed the eggs and then paid the members, offered the opportunity for corrupt practices. The secretary often substituted 'doubtful' eggs of his family for those

---

<sup>40</sup> Fifteen "circles" (centres which were used for purposes of collecting eggs were popularly referred to as "circles") were centred on Broderick Falls (Webuye). Graded, candled and boxed eggs went off to Nairobi or Mombasa, where these Egg Centres fulfilled a big military contract. Webuye alone handled between 44,000 and 50,000 eggs a month, and paid out £500 and £1000. For more information, see Ibid., p.213.

of others, and when the owner of the substituted transaction received the price for a lower grade egg there was complaint to the Nyanza Egg Service.<sup>41</sup>

Table 9 shows some of the eggs purchased at various centres indicating their grades in 1945.

---

<sup>41</sup> In a tour of Nyanza registered poultry keepers' co-operative societies, Elspeth Huxley described the system of operations in the following terms, having seen the collection centres operated by the Nyanza Egg Service provided by the Maize and Produce Control:

In a partitioned-off section of one of these Broderick Falls go-downs, Africans were candling eggs. The clerk in charge, a brisk intelligent ex-soldier, explained the system. Fifteen people form themselves into an Egg Circle and appoint one of their member as secretary. Once a week he collects the eggs and brings them to this centre. Here the clerk, wrestling with a most complicated set of receipts and waybills, pays him according to the grade of his eggs. Prices vary from day to day and the clerk is kept informed every morning from produce control in Kisumu. (as quoted by Fearn from E.Huxley)

And, Fearn adds, this description incorrectly suggests that the members were men, but in fact they were women with a man acting as a secretary. For details, see Ibid., p.213.

Table 9

Grades of Eggs in Some Centres in 1945

Centre	1st Grad	2nd Grad	3rd Grad	Cooking	Bad	Total	% of Fresh Eggs
Kimilili	2,309	3349	1730	1599	1101	10088	70%
Chebukwa	1,709	1839	253	653	340	4,794	80%
Khachonge	1,743	1901	431	817	611	5,503	80%
Shang'alo	718	1036	578	306	219	2,857	80%
Total	6,479	8,125	2992	3375	2271	23242	70%

Source: PC/NZA/3/2/164, Poultry and Poultry Farming Department of Agriculture, Kakamega, 1940-1945.

From table 9, it can be observed that the use of the grades further limited the number of eggs which were acceptable for export. The grading system also reduced the profits women earned from the sale of eggs because eggs in grade one cost two cents more than eggs in grade three and one cent more than eggs in grade two.<sup>42</sup> However, the egg business declined as the colonial period progressed because of difficulties of transportation and a limited market. East Africa had supplied fresh eggs for the service men in the

---

<sup>42</sup> KNA, PC/NZA/3/2/164, Poultry and Poultry farming, 1940-1945, p. 13, see subsection (C) on the price of eggs in North Kavirondo.

Middle East and at the end of the war, the egg market decreased. Consequently, the demand for fresh eggs declined and even the egg circles closed down. However the demand for fresh eggs picked up again in the independent period. The growth of urban centres has contributed to the rise of the egg market in Kenya. In Western Province, the production and marketing of eggs in the 1980s was as indicated in table 10. Eggs have been extremely important to women because they were entirely under their control.

Table 10

Increase in Egg Production in Western Province, 1980-1983

Year	1980	1981	1982	1983
No. of poultry	16,000	18,000	20,000	24,000
No. of eggs	3.2M	3.6M	4M	4.8M

Source: RoK, Bungoma District Development Plan, 1979-1983, (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1978), p.42.

Women participated in other forms of small scale non-farm businesses. These included the brewing of traditional beer, the production and sale of pottery products, basketry products, and mats. Women also sold green vegetables, smoked mushrooms, white ants, cooked foods, firewood and water fetched from distant springs for rich families in rural areas. Mushrooms and ants were gathered by women and children from the wild, processed and then converted into marketable commodities. This diversification of commodities was clearly

to increase women's profit margins. Prior to 1965 the urban market in Kenya was very small, less than 9% of the population. After 1965 the annual growth rate of urbanization rose between 7.2 and 8.6% into the late 1980's. Thus by 1987 the percent of the population which had become urban and a potential market for women's food production had risen to 22% of the whole.<sup>43</sup> As the World Bank argues, "often governments have kept farm prices...artificially low... The market for locally produced traditional food ...have consequently been compressed."<sup>44</sup> This policy has generally hurt the women's sector and usually favoured export crops or the male sector.

After the shift to maize cultivation as the staple in Western Province, women continued to cultivate patches of eleusine. Apart from being a food crop, eleusine was also used in brewing traditional beer as a yeast while sorghum and maize served as the main ingredients. Sorghum was the main ingredient for brewing traditional beer before maize was popularized in the 1940s and which subsequently replaced sorghum particularly in the brewing of busaa and chang'aa. As the cultivation of eleusine had come to be largely conducted by women and as the brewing of beer had traditionally been women's work, the beer industry in the colonial period became

---

<sup>43</sup> World Bank, Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth, Washington, D.C., 1989, Table 35, p.278.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p.91.



one of the profitable cash ventures for women. This continues to be the case up to the present.

The commercialization of beer brewing took a more dramatic turn in the 1940s with expanded production of maize. Initially, beer was brewed and sold by women in individual homes.<sup>45</sup> But, in the late 1950s, beer clubs were established in local markets. Several factors shifted beer selling from individual homes. More customers could be reached in clubs located in market centres. More than one person sold beer in the club, so more women could participate in the beer selling business. Clubs were officially licensed by the local county councils or municipal councils and consequently the business was not illegal and women beer brewers were not harassed by police and other law enforcement agents.<sup>46</sup> Because of the advantages which beer clubs provided, both to the women brewers and drinkers, the clubs became very popular particularly in Western Province. In fact, by the time President Daniel Arap Moi abolished beer clubs in Kenya in 1979, Western Province had the highest number of them in the

---

<sup>45</sup> John Carlsen noted that, "of the traditional homecrafts, the brewing of local beer and spirits (chang'aa) seems to have managed quite well in the competition with imported items... of non-agricultural activities as many as 10 percent of the rural households or approximately 12,000 women were brewing and selling beer. The average monthly income was about 100 shs. For details, see John Carlsen, Economic and Social Transformation in Rural Kenya, (Copenhagen: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1980), pp.120-121.

<sup>46</sup> Only busaa or kwete was sold in these beer clubs and not chang'aa.

whole republic.<sup>47</sup> Beer brewing was obviously the most profitable cash venture undertaken by women.

There are different types of traditional beer, each priced differently. There was a mixture of traditional beer with banana wine, chang'aa (Nubian gin) and kwete or busaa, which was a local brew from white maize. The most expensive alcoholic beverage was the illegally distilled form of dry gin, called chang'aa. A mixture of beer with banana wine and kwete was the cheapest. One glass of chang'aa in the 1950s was 50 cents, but this increased to 1.00 Kenyan shilling in the 1960s. A bottle (pint) of chang'aa used to cost 1.50 to 2.00 shillings in the 1950s. In the 1960s it had increased to 2.50 to 4.00 shillings. By the 1970s, a pint of chang'aa cost twenty to thirty shillings and this increased to forty to sixty shillings in the 1980s.<sup>48</sup> The cost of chang'aa was very high and as a result, it was sold mostly by the glass. One glass cost Kshs. 1.50 to Kshs.5.00 depending on the size and place of purchase. Chang'aa was costly because of the expensive ingredients used in its production, which included sugar and yeast. The process of distilling chang'aa was

---

<sup>47</sup> Beer clubs were banned in 1979 for two reasons, to reduce drunkenness in the country and second, to encourage peasant maize producers to sell their maize through the government official marketing Maize and Produce Board. The government argued that more maize ended up in the busaa and brewing business instead of the maize and Produce Board and this reduced the country's food supply.

<sup>48</sup> Kerementine Naliaka, Oral interview, Chwele, Bungoma, 1988. This informant has been very active in this business for many years.

tedious as well as expensive and since it was illegal, courage was needed to take the risk of preparing it. The risk was also reflected in the high price.

**Case Studies of Women Traders in Western Province, 1940-1963**

Women also earned limited amounts of cash through the petty marketing of cash crops such as cotton, maize and in some cases coffee. Women usually sold these in small quantities, mostly during the harvest season. However, some business women sold in large quantities.

Sarah, 78 years old, was one of the women petty traders in Western Province. She made pots for domestic use until 1950. In the 1950s, she began to make pots and exchange them for maize. Sometimes, she exchanged pots against baskets from Mt. Elgon Kalenjin. The cost of a pot depended on its size. A medium sized water-pot sold for forty to sixty cobs of maize. A small sized pot for brewing beer (sipanga) sold for forty to fifty cobs of maize. Sarah sold other commodities as well. These included sugar, salt, matches, paraffin, soap and cooking fat (ghee and cotton seed oil). She bought these items in large quantities and then exchanged them against maize. Table 11 indicates the quantity and rates of exchange Sarah used to charge her customers.

Sarah exchanged maize with other commodities from Indian shopkeepers. In fact, women in the rural area in Kenya copied the Indian dukawallahs and their barter system of trade.

Table 11

Quantity and Equivalent Rates, 1950-1960

<u>Quantity</u>	<u>Equivalent Rates</u>
1 mug of sugar (lb.)	20 maize cobs
1 glass of salt (1/2 lb.)	6 maize cobs
1 bar soap	20 maize cobs
1 basket	20-60 maize cobs depending on the size
1 cup of paraffin	5 maize cobs
1 cupful of oil ( <u>udo</u> or <u>samuli</u> )	20 maize cobs
1 box of matches	5 maize cobs

---

Source: Sarah Nabwala, oral interview, Bungoma, 1988.<sup>49</sup>

Despite the colonial criticism, Indians were flexible and their trading system provided an important model for women traders. Sarah and other businesswomen in Western Province used this model to their advantage. The wide variety of commodities sold by Sarah indicated in table 11 provides testimony to this point. Most of the commodities were not manufactured locally such as sugar, soap and cooking fat. The

---

<sup>49</sup> This system of barter was encouraged by Indian shopkeepers (dukawallahs) who lived in rural areas or large towns. Africans understood the barter system of trade far much better than any other. As Bernard observed, "the Asians attempted to barter with Africans for produce that could be exported and sold for a good profit outside the reserves because they recognised that trading with the Africans for cash limited their commercial scope, since African wage levels were so low that only a poor living could be had by dealing with those who had surplus cash from their work on European farms." For details, see Frank E. Bernard, "Meru District in the Kenya Spatial Economy: 1890-1950" in D.R.F. Taylor and R.A. Ombuiho, (ed.) The Spatial Structure of Development: A Study of Kenya, (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1979), p.266.

Indians played an important role as agents of the money economy and the first introduction of Africans to the organised rural non-farm sector activities was through the Indian dukawallahs. However, the colonial administrators criticized the Indian traders on numerous occasions for encouraging Africans to barter rather than to trade for money.<sup>50</sup> Transportation was easy. Business in foodstuffs thrived. Female enterprises expanded as the commodities handled by Sarah in table 12 suggests and therefore more profits were made by businesswomen. The presence of Indian dukawallahs in rural market centres obviously facilitated women's participation in rural non-farm sector activities.

It can be observed from table 11 that with the introduction of a cash economy, women's commercial activities diversified. However, the cost of commodities did not take into account the changing rates for maize; the cost of maize fluctuated considerably in different years.<sup>51</sup> Maize was being used instead of cash because it was later resold at a better price and therefore with increased profits for the petty trader. Maize was either sold to maize cooperative societies or to Indian traders who had established themselves at different market centres. The cost of the commodities listed

---

<sup>50</sup> For analysis, see I.G.R.Spencer, "The First Assault on Indian Ascendancy: Indian Traders in the Kenyan Reserves" in African Affairs, 80, July, 1981, pp.331-333.

<sup>51</sup> See chapter four for details on the price of maize offered by the K.F.A and the Maize and Produce Board in Kenya for the period under study.

in table 11 also depended on the geographical location of the area. In some areas, the cost was higher than that listed in table 11 which was a reflection of what Sarah charged her customers.

Between 1950 and 1953, Sarah used to sell up to five lorry-loads of maize per year to Akbar, an Indian trader at Lwakhakha. This seems to fit the observation made by Freeman and Norcliffe who argued, "the first commercial dealings by Africans in and around the African Reserves, thus, were probably with the local Asian dukawallahs."<sup>52</sup> As a result of her trading activities, she managed to buy four acres of farmland at Kibichori. The cost of land in Kenya has continued to increase over the years. However, for a woman like Sarah, buying land was the most visible form of investment. Land ownership was a male privilege and therefore Sarah's action demonstrated that given the opportunity and money, women were capable and were beginning to penetrate into the male-dominated form of property. She also paid school fees and bought school uniforms for her children with the money earned from her trading activities. One of her sons is a primary school teacher and the other, she proudly reported, is a university professor.

---

<sup>52</sup> Indeed as Freeman and Norcliffe argued, "Indians came from an economic tradition in which capital accumulation, profit seeking, entrepreneurship and acquisitiveness were well-established principles." For details, see Freeman and Norcliffe, Rural Enterprise in Kenya, p.25.

Sarah's trading activities were carried out both in her home and at the open-air markets. Her customers used to visit to her house to purchase paraffin or pots. Because she was not based at any particular market centre, Sarah did not need to buy a license from the local county council. Further, she did not have a permanent shop where she sold her commodities. As a result, Sarah's income varied a great deal depending on the season. During harvesting seasons, she made maximum profit but this declined during the period of scarcity.

Miriam, born in 1914, traded in foodstuffs. In the 1940s she sold ripe bananas, porridge and boiled maize. In 1950 she built a tea canteen at Chwele market. Here, she sold tea, scones and mandazi (doughnuts). She also bought bananas from other women in the surrounding areas at a cheap price and took them to Kitale, where she resold them at a profit. She used bus transport, operated by an Indian called Modi who owned buses which operated between Kitale and Malakisi via Chwele.

In 1957, Miriam rented the tea canteen at the Chwele Cooperative Society. Here, she exchanged tea against coffee mbuni<sup>53</sup>, with farmers who brought coffee to the cooperative society. One cup of tea and mandazi (doughnuts) was

---

<sup>53</sup> Coffee mbuni is the dry coffee beans which is not processed through the coffee factory. Such coffee beans usually dry on the coffee stems before they are picked.

equivalent to one sibaba of coffee mbuni.<sup>54</sup> The coffee mbuni which she bought in this way was later resold to the co-operative society after she dried it with the help of her children. In 1958, she sold twenty eight bags of coffee mbuni to the cooperative society; in 1959, she sold twenty bags.

As a result of her trading activities, Miriam managed to buy eight acres of land at Makhonge. She also bought a hand-operated maize gristing mill, and built a hotel at Chwele market. She became one of the wealthiest businesswomen in the division. All her children became highly educated.

For Miriam, the following were the rates of exchange. The price of foodstuffs such as bananas was standardized because Miriam like other women traders in the province used the rates indicated in table 12. As Miriam explained, "these rates were used everywhere in the province and if you paid less than what other women traders offered, you could never get anybody to sell their produce to you. Everybody avoided you and eventually you lost all your business contacts."<sup>55</sup>

Table 12  
Exchange Rates in Western Province, 1950-1985

---

<sup>54</sup> sibaba: was a small standard tin used for measuring smaller quantities of either maize, eleusine, sorghum, groundnuts or coffee mbuni. In the 1970s, this was replaced by the two kilogram tins popularly referred to as kilo mblili.

<sup>55</sup> Miriam Walucho, oral interview Bungoma, 1988. Prices for commodities were generally agreed upon by women traders and they were always on the look out to see who offered more than what they had agreed upon. Such traders were warned and sometimes we reported them to the Municipal market clerks or County Council clerks. In this way our buying prices were "uniform" in the province.



<u>Quantity</u>	<u>Equivalent Rates</u>
1 bunch of banana	50 cents
1 <u>mandazi</u>	10 cents
1 scones	10 cents
In 1950-53: 8-12 ripe bananas	10 cents
From 1954-1956: 6-10 ripe bananas	10 cents
From 1957-1960: 5-8 ripe bananas	10 cents
From 1965-1973: 4-6 ripe	20-40 cents
In 1983: 3 ripe bananas	50 cents
In 1985: 3 ripe bananas	1.00 shilling (but bananas from Uganda were more expensive: 3 bananas cost 1.50)
1 glass of banana wine	80 cents to 1.00 shilling.

---

Source: Ben Wanambisi, Oral interview, Bungoma, 1988.

Milling rates were almost similar throughout the province. As Wanabisi explained, "if you charged higher rates, your gristing mill was avoided and therefore you operated at a loss."<sup>56</sup> The following were the rates for grinding maize, sorghum or eleusine in hand operated mills.

Table 13

Milling Rates in Western Province

<u>Quantity</u>	<u>Equivalent Rates</u>
1 tin of maize	36 maize cobs
1 tin of eleusine	30-45 maize cobs
1 tin of sorghum	30-45 maize cobs
1 tin of <u>kamamela</u> <sup>57</sup>	30-48 maize cobs

---

Source: Ben Wanambisi, Oral interview, Bungoma, 1988.

---

<sup>56</sup> Ben Wanambisi, oral interview, Bungoma, 1988. He added, "the grinding gear was expensive and this is what contributed to the high rates charged for grinding especially millet and sorghum."

<sup>57</sup> Kamamela (Yeast): This was germinated eleusine used for the brewing of local liquor.

Most people who owned hand gristing mills did not encourage their customers to grind sorghum and eleusine in their mills. The high rates charged were meant to discourage would-be users. Indeed, as Wanambisi explained, "the rate of depreciation for the grinding gear was high especially when small grains like eleusine and sorghum were ground. This also meant that the gear had to be replaced at frequent intervals for fine milling."<sup>58</sup> The gear was expensive and therefore frequent replacement meant less profit for the owners of the gristing mills.

Nakhaya was born in 1920. She started her business in 1950 with a total of fifteen Kenya shillings which was given to her by her husband. In 1950, she started by buying maize in small standard tins (bibaba) pl. for sibaba. One small standard tin was sold to her at five cents to fifteen cents on what was popularly referred to as the black market, i.e at unofficial rates. In 1951, she sold three lorry-loads of maize to the Indian trader at Malakisi. Between 1952 and 1956, she bought and sold maize to the maize cooperative society at Kuywa in 1952/53, six lorry-loads of maize, in 1953/54, she sold five lorry-loads, seven lorry-loads in 1954/55 and in 1955/56, she sold eight lorry-loads.<sup>59</sup>

Nakhaya participated in other commercial activities. She bought bananas from women in the neighbourhood and then resold

---

<sup>58</sup> Ben Wanambisi, oral interview, Bungoma, 1988.

<sup>59</sup> Selina Nakhaya Kwoba, Oral interview, Bungoma, 1987.

them at Kitale and Eldoret. From Kitale and Eldoret, she would bring second-hand clothes which she sold at the local market. The cost of transporting one bunch of bananas from one point to the other was 25 cents from 1950 to 1955. But from 1956 onwards, this increased to 50 cents. The cost of buying bananas from producers depended on the size of the banana but they generally ranged between 50 cents and 1.50 between 1950-1955. This increased to 1.00 shilling and above after 1956. Second-hand clothes cost between 75 cents and 4.00 shillings. Nakhaya sold sugar, paraffin, vegetable salt and cooking fat as well.

As a result of her participation in commercial activities, Nakhaya managed to purchase her own business plot and in 1954 she built her own shop which earned her the nickname Nakhaya (one who cannot be defeated or managed). She acquired this name because of her business skills and ability to manoeuvre in a male dominated society. This name is very important, firstly in its accurate reflection of the kind of woman she was and secondly because it reflects the patriarchal ideology that most women could be defeated, could be managed and presumably not only could be but should be. In 1957, she also bought six acres of land which in 1988 was occupied by her last-born son. Nakhaya lives at the back of the shop which she built in 1957. She bought several other things, including a sewing machine. Nakhaya employed male tailors to

make clothes for people in her shop which once again imitated the practice of Indian traders.

Julia, born in 1912, used to sell foodstuffs such as cooked bananas, porridge and boiled maize. She also sold paraffin, cigarettes, vegetable salt, sugar and green vegetables. Through her trading activities, she managed to purchase a plough at Kshs.200 in 1959. She had already bought a hand grinding mill at Kshs.150 in 1955. She also bought four goats, which she later exchanged for two cows. These two cows were used by her husband to purchase a piece of land in the settlement scheme in 1964. Julia paid school fees for her co-wife's children as she did not have any of her own. She added, " I paid school fees for his [her husband's] children because I did not want him to interfere with my trading activities." She also used to pay school fees and buy the uniform for her sisters' daughter who lived with her. Julia, however regrets not having invested part of her profits in a bank or post-office savings account. She was not aware of the existence of these facilities during her active business days. This ignorance was common among rural illiterate businessmen and men. In most cases they operated their businesses on very limited knowledge which affected their performance and investment options. As a result, their progress was slow and with time, because of the high market competition, many gave up.

Several other women traders, through their commercial activities, seemed bent on investing profits in children's education. Marita Manasi was born in 1919. She is married with several children. She used to buy and sell bananas in Kitale. She also sold sugar-cane, ripe bananas, green-vegetables and a variety of fruits. Her trading activities generated enough to educate all her children.

There were other women traders who participated in all sorts of commercial activities. For instance, Kerementine brewed all types of beer ranging from kwete to chang'aa.<sup>60</sup> She also sold green-vegetable, sweet-potatoes, dried cassava, kamamela (yeast), and both raw and ripe bananas.

It is remarkable that these women traders developed no commodity specialisation, or to put this more positively, that they were highly skilled in diversification of their activities. It appears almost a rule that the more diversified the commodities they dealt in, the more successful the women were. They were at the mercy of market forces beyond their control and their activities were so small in scale that there was no hope to control supply or demand. Thus it was essential to move with great agility from one item to another where profit suggested itself. They had clearly learned the economic dictum that diversification spreads risk. These women were almost all illiterate, yet they developed

---

<sup>60</sup> Kerementine Naliaka, oral interview, Chwele, 18/1/1988. Kwete and chang'aa are locally brewed beer.

remarkable oral mathematical memory skills, which were of course essential if they were to have any success. It is astonishing that so many informants could quote prices, or barter ratios, from times as far back as fifty years ago, engraved in their oral memory ledgers. Indeed, it is tempting to suggest that these oral skills may have given them an agility and speed of business decision-making that allowed them to find their niches in petty trading which would have been too cumbersome and slow for a literate trader with his invoices and ledgers to cope with.

Women traders could not have succeeded in their businesses without their children. Miriam remarked that, "I could not have managed without the help of my children"<sup>61</sup> Children fetched water which she used at the canteen. Similarly, because of the low profit margins, she could not afford to purchase firewood from other women. So initially she relied on her children (both boys and girls), who collected firewood needed for preparing tea and other foodstuffs sold at the canteen. Additionally, children assisted Miriam to dry coffee mbuni in the sun. Coffee harvesting usually took place in the months of September to November, which was also a short rain season. As a result, children took out coffee mbuni to dry in the sun and returned it in the store whenever the afternoon rains began. Miriam

---

<sup>61</sup> Ben Wanambisi, oral interview, Bungoma, 1988.

added that children were aware that her business activities paid for their school fees and uniforms. Miriam used this bargaining chip by ensuring that cooperative children got their fees and uniforms before those children who were less helpful.

Other women traders also agreed that their children's contribution was crucial. It enabled them to participate in a variety of business activities.<sup>62</sup> Children, noted Sarah, helped to transport bulky and fragile articles like pots to market centres on weekly market days. The dominant mode of transport, at least from the house to the first market, was and has remained head-load transportation. Similarly, children also stayed at home and fulfilled other functions which their mothers would otherwise have performed. In some cases, children accompanied their mothers to nearby market centres, especially on market days, to assist them in selling and handling cash. Mature children were particularly useful in this area.<sup>63</sup> This was particularly true during weekends and school vacations.

Women's participation in commercial activities did not reduce their workload. In fact, women's participation in trading activities was a part-time undertaking. Some women combined farm activities with business. Trading was therefore

---

<sup>62</sup> Marita, Miriam and Nakhaya, Oral interviews Bungoma, 1987-1988.

<sup>63</sup> Nakhaya, oral interview, Bungoma, 1988

a supplementary activity. The success of rural women traders also depended on the assistance which they got from their children.

In fact, all women traders had a definite relationship to the land. Some women stated that their desire to participate in market trade was a result of the low market prices for agricultural products, low productivity of small agricultural units, lack of investment in the agricultural sector and unavailability of land to farm.

However, women played a substantial if not major role in the development of markets and market trade in Western Province. Furthermore, the relative role of women in marketing agricultural produce increased with the rise of the weekly markets. But, on the whole, it was still women who sold by the small tin and the men who sold in bulk. This meant that the profit women made through the petty marketing of cash crops was minimal and therefore they had to participate in a variety of commercial activities to make maximum profits. Additionally, women undertook market activities because it was the only area which was open for them regardless of their educational background. As a result, women's desire to diversify and experiment with other survival strategies developed in the 1950s onwards.

**Women and Children's Participation in Rural Non-Farm Sector Enterprises in Western Province, 1963-1985**



According to the 1972 International Labour Organisation employment report in Kenya, informal sector activities are characterized by a) ease of entry, b) reliance on indigenous resources, c) family ownership of enterprises, d) small scale operation, e) labour-intensive and adapted technology, f) skills acquired outside the formal school system and g) unregulated and competitive markets.<sup>64</sup> The informal sector activities constitute what has been correctly described as the "survival economy". As Marilyn Carr correctly notes, "the survival economy persists under adverse conditions because it is small-scale, flexible and uses local inputs, and because owners are resourceful, ingenious and hardworking. What is distributed is essential to the basic needs of the community."<sup>65</sup>

Similarly, in another study carried out by the ILO/Jobs and Skills Programmes for Africa (JASPA) mission, the informal sector is described as:

a poor man's sector: it is a sector of the poor, by the poor, for the poor. ... In consequence, the sector caters to the needs of the poor in terms of food, clothing and housing. These items perforce take up the largest share of poor people's budgets-anything around 75-80 per cent- and thus provide

---

<sup>64</sup> ILO, Employment, Incomes and Equality, p.6. The characteristics of formal sector activities are the obverse of these, namely: a) difficulty entry; b) frequent reliance on overseas resources; c) corporate ownership; d) large scale operation; e) capital-intensive and often imported technology; f) formally acquired skills, often expatriate; and g) protected markets (through tariffs, quotas and trade licenses).

<sup>65</sup> Carr Employment for Rural Women, p. 8.

the market and economic basis for informal sector enterprises. Conversely, the informal sector activities are mostly concentrated in provisioning basic needs, one would venture that 75 per cent of the value added in the informal sector is concentrated on the basic needs mentioned above. The fact thus stands out is that the sector is concerned with survival- both of the entrepreneurs and their customers. The sector creates "survival" incomes by selling survival goods.<sup>66</sup>

In Kenya the growing number of landless among the rural population has facilitated women's, men's and children's participation in rural non-farm sector activities. In Kenya, the most important categories of the rural non-farm sector activities were grouped into various categories by the Integrated Rural Survey Module 1 (Central Bureau of Statistics, 1977). They included: manufacture of food, beverages and tobacco products, total services, manufacture of wood products, manufacture of plant and animal fiber products, weaving apparel, resource extraction and wholesale and retail trading.<sup>67</sup> Most rural non-farm sector activities include simple processing of raw materials and the provision of a wide

---

<sup>66</sup> ILO/JASPA, Informal Sector in Africa, JASPA, Addis Ababa, 1985, pp.16-17. In fact, in an eloquent introduction to Hernando De Soto's book, The Other Path, Vargas Llosa wrote, "the informal economy is the people's spontaneous and creative response to the state's incapacity to satisfy the basic needs of the impoverished masses. The people have shown more daring effort, imagination, and dedication to the country than their legal competitors." For more information, see De Soto, The Other Path, (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1989), pp.iii-iv.

<sup>67</sup> Republic of Kenya, Central Bureau of Statistics, (CBS), Integrated Rural Survey, Module 1-4, 1975-1977. A total of some 100 different non-farm activities were reported by the 2,232 households surveyed in the sample.

range of traditional services and crafts. A critical assessment of individual types of activity in these broad categories indicates that one or a few specific activities account for the relative importance of the whole category. The table below presents data from Central Bureau of Statistics and Integrated Rural Survey to show the various rural non-farm sector enterprises in Western Province and Kenya in general in 1977.

However, a critical assessment of individual types of activity in these broad categories indicates that one or a few specific activities account for the relative importance of the whole category. Beer brewing, was the dominant non-farm sector activity in Western Province, and predominates in the entire category. The CBS' sample revealed that beer brewing was present in 26 per cent of Nyanza households, followed by 17.6 per cent in Western Province

Table 14

A Detailed Classification of Non-farm Sector Activities in Some Provinces in Kenya (Based on I.R.S. National Survey of Non-farm Activities, 1977)

Activity category	Central No.   %	Nyanza No.   %	Western No.   %	National No.   %
Resource Extraction	9     2.5	90   17.5	45   14.0	269  12.1
Manufacture of food, beverages and Tobacco products	21   5.9	188  36.5	81   25.1	497  22.3

Manufacture of plant and animal fibre products and wearing apparel	15 4.2	63 12.2	22 6.8	277 12.4
Manufacture of wood products	42 11.8	87 16.9	45 14.0	312 14.0
Pottery Products	- -	28 5.4	3 0.9	38 1.7
Manufacture of metal products	6 1.7	8 1.6	4 1.2	27 1.2
Construction	- -	15 2.9	8 2.5	43 1.9
Wholesale and Retail Trading	26 7.3	70 13.7	39 12.1	207 9.3
Repairing	11 3.1	46 8.9	20 6.2	131 5.4
Total Services	51 14.3	74 14.7	69 21.4	397 17.8

Source: I.R.S, National Household Survey of Non-farm Activities, CBS, 1977 (unpublished). In table 15, number indicates the establishments under the category listed that were investigated and percent is calculated on the basis of total establishments under the category in the country. households.<sup>68</sup> Beer brewing was almost exclusively done by

women, and was reported in 13.4 per cent of the households of the CBS' national sample in 1977. In fact even after beer brewing was banned in Kenya in 1979 by President Moi, this activity is still carried out both in rural and urban areas,

---

<sup>68</sup> Freeman and Norcliffe observed that Western, Nyanza and Eastern Provinces generally rank highest on many of the broad activity categories listed, indicating that such occupations are more prevalent in these provinces than elsewhere. For details, see Freeman and Norcliffe, Rural Enterprise in Kenya, p.65.

but illegally.<sup>69</sup> Beer brewing is the most profitable business for both rural and urban women.

Indeed, individual activities like charcoal making, wood cutting, and general duka (shop) operation have an impact on the relative importance of their respective activity category. Other important activities include several traditional cottage industries such as rope, basketry and pottery making, textile weaving or knitting as well as resource extraction occupations such as fishing, hunting and gathering. In fact as Freeman and Norcliffe correctly stated, "agro-processing, that is, the conversion of farm produce or other materials from field or forest into forms that are more valuable and usable, alone comprises more than 16 percent. This subsector makes many jobs available for women, especially for those who must work part of the time on the family farm, and who are less likely to be literate."<sup>70</sup> But as the authors of the CBS surved, non-farm activities seem to be considered a necessary part-time occupation to supplement the income from agriculture and employment.<sup>71</sup> In fact, the ILO mission to Kenya in 1972

---

<sup>69</sup> Nelson, "'Women must help each other'" See also I.Livingstone notes that "manufacture of food, beverages and tobacco products is much more important due especially to pombe brewing (other drinks at the Coast), which is extremely important cottage industry in Kenya! I.Livingstone, Rural Development, Employment and Incomes in Kenya, p.73.

<sup>70</sup> Freeman and Norcliffe, Rural Enterprise in Kenya, p.70.

<sup>71</sup> Apart from supporting non-farming households, non-farm activities may yield supplementary income to farming families. For details, see Livingstone, Rural Development, Employment and Incomes in Kenya, p.79. See other sources which have

estimated average earnings of adult wage workers on small farms as Kshs. 2,000 (U.S \$ 106) per annum and in rural non-agricultural enterprises as Kshs 2,400 (U.S.\$126) a difference of 19 percent.<sup>72</sup> This demonstrates a serious trend in which rural families have been discovering that exchange is more profitable than production.

In Kenya, the majority of workers in non-farm sector enterprises are males. This contrasts very sharply with West Africa, where most non-farm sector workers are women. Lagos market women traders are a good example. In fact, in Kenya, according to the CBS' Rural non-farm activities survey, (RNFA), women represent under a fifth of all workers in this sector.<sup>73</sup> However, there is a growing amount of evidence which suggests that the RNFA survey underestimated the participation of women in this sector. Table 16 provides data from I.R.S survey to indicate the participation of women and children in the rural non-farm sector activities.

---

examined evidence from other regions and they too, concur with Livingstone's observation. For example, A.Chuta and C.Liedholm, Rural Non-Farm Employment,

<sup>72</sup> ILO, Employment, Incomes and Equality, pp.75-77.

<sup>73</sup> John Carlsen for instance observed that, "a great number of rural people work part-time or occasionally with non-farm enterprises, most of which are dominated by women for instance homecraft, petty trade and illegal beer brewing. The number of people engaged in these occupations are probably more than double the number engaged on a permanent basis. For details, see Carlsen, Economic and Social Transformation in Rural Kenya, p.117.

Table 15

**Participation of Women and Children in Rural Non-farm Sector  
Activities in Kenya in the 1970s**

Women in Non-farm activities per cent	Ctral 29.0	Coas 9.3	East 25.7	Nyan 28.9	Rift 6.9	West 11.3	Nati onal 19.0
Percent of Children of Household Heads	7.9	13.3	10.9	9.6	6.1	11.3	9.7

Source: IRS Nonfarm Module 2, 1977-78, CBS (unpublished).

From table 15 Western Province has a very low proportion of women in non-farm sector enterprises, which the 1977-78 survey estimated as 11.3 per cent. However, Kongsted and Monsted disagree with the CBS' findings and argue that the I.R.S drastically underestimated women's trade. Women's sales in trading centres and markets accounts for half of the total sales of the rural households.<sup>74</sup> As a result, Kongsted and Monsted suggest that "around 30 per cent of adult women participate somehow in petty trade to earn necessary cash."<sup>75</sup> The percentage has increased since then because of the food shortages in the 1970s and 1980s.

---

<sup>74</sup> Kongstad and Monsted, Family, Labour and Trade in Western Kenya, p.98. Additionally, Kongsted and Monsted stated that, "women, whether "petty traders" or just engaged in the exchange of their own produce for other use values, mostly do their business at the market places and trading centres." See p.96.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p.96.

Similarly, table 15 indicates that 11.3 per cent of non-farm entrepreneurs in Western Province were children of the household heads. At the national level, over 9 per cent of the children are engaged in rural non-farm sector activities. In fact, in this category, Coast Province led other provinces with 13.3 per cent followed by Western.

The age of participants in the rural non-farm sector activities is also important. For instance, the CBS' IRS provides data on the age and gender of the rural participants in the non-farm sector enterprises. The majority of women traders were above 35 years old. This is the age group which would most likely have older children to provide care for the younger ones when their mothers were away trading in the market. Women between twenty and thirty years do less trade because of family demands and responsibilities. However, single women heads of households in this group still participated in market trade because they needed to raise money for school fees and uniforms. Table 16 provides some useful hints on the age and gender of the rural participants in non-farm sector activities.



Table 16

**Participation by Women and Young Adults in Nonfarm Sector  
Activities in Kenya**

	Ctrl	Cost	East	Nyan	Rift	West	Nation
Percent of wives of household head in RNFA	18.4	5.3	9.9	20.6	5.2	4.8	11.0
Percent of operators under 30 years	34.2	49.3	26.7	32.3	42.6	29.0	36.2

Source: IRS Nonfarm Module 2, 1977-78, (CBS, Unpublished)

Two points come out very clearly from table 16. First, the table reveals the youthful character of workers in the rural non-farm sector enterprises. At the national level, over 36.2 per cent are under thirty years of age.<sup>76</sup> This high participation of the youth in rural non-farm sector activities is as a result of unemployment and landlessness to be discussed below. Second, women participants, even at the household level have also been underestimated by the IRS survey. Table 16 indicates that only 4.8 percent of non-farm entrepreneurs are the wives of household heads in Western

---

<sup>76</sup> There is no evidence to suggest that 62% of the over 30s are in non-farm sector employment. The chances are that the level of unemployment increases and gets worse as one moves beyond the 30s and 40s population groups. While disguised unemployment has also been a problem in African countries, it is mostly this population group which constitutes the majority.

Province. The national average is 11.0 percent. However, the table below provides data on percentage distribution of rural non-farm activities involving holder farmer households in Western Province.

Table 17

**Percentage Distribution of Rural Nonfarm Activities Involving Holder Farmer Households in Western Province**

<u>Activity</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Resource Extraction (e.g wood cutters, Hunters etc)	14.0
Food, Beverage and Tobacco manufacturing	25.1
Manufacturing of plant and animal fibre (e.g baskets etc)	6.8
Manufacturing of wood products (e.g charcoal)	14.0
Pottery manufacturing	9.0
Metal manufacturing	1.2
Construction	4.6
Wholesale/Retail Trade	12.1
Repairing	6.2
Services	21.4

Source: ROK, Social Perspectives, Vol.2, No.2, June 1977, Table 14.

Table 17 reveals a variety of rural non-farm sector enterprises. Women participate in some of these enterprises in Kenya. In Western Province, the leading non-farm enterprises include; pombe (beer) brewing, posho (maize milling) mills, bread bakeries and joggery mills. This is

followed by the percentage of households engaged in the provision of services such as renting goods, matatu (mini bus transport services) operating, bars and lodging houses.<sup>77</sup> Similarly, the 1979-1983 Kakamega District Development Plan stated:

More than 55% of all small-holder farmer households are engaged in at least one non-farm activity. The most important ones are pombe (beer) brewing, charcoal making, retailing, and wood cutting.<sup>78</sup>

Indeed, the reasons for the high engagement in non-farm activities relate mainly to the sizes of the rural holdings which are too small or insufficiently productive to supply the total needs of the households. This concurs with I. Livingstone's observation that, "the poorer households who are short of land are forced to seek out non-farm opportunities."<sup>79</sup> In Vihiga Division in Kakamega District, approximately 80 percent of all holdings are less than 1.5

---

<sup>77</sup> The 1979-83 Bungoma District Development Plan notes that, "in terms of the frequency of specific activities at the provincial level, pombe brewing, charcoal making, fishing and dukas (shop) operation appear to be the most prevalent non-farming activities in Western Province. For details, see ROK, Bungoma District Development Plan 1979-1983, (Nairobi: Government Printer), 1980, p.20.

<sup>78</sup> ROK, Kakamega District Development Plan, 1979-1983, (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1980), p.54. In addition, the 1979-83 Bungoma District Development Plan noted that, " 25.1% of the households engaged in non-farm activities in Western Province earn their living from manufacturing of food beverages and tobacco products". For additional information on this, see Bungoma District Development Plan, 1979-83, p.20.

<sup>79</sup> Livingstone, Rural Development, Employment and Incomes in Kenya, pp.76-88.

hectares, i.e below the 'economical size' which would allow a subsistence-plus production.<sup>80</sup> Similarly, the 1979-83 Bungoma District Development Plan noted that, " in 1970 a total of 1006 plots in Bungoma were below 0.99 hectares in size each."<sup>81</sup> In addition, a direct count of the number of plots below 1.2 hectares (3.5 acres) in four locations revealed that the number of plots whose sizes were 1.2 hectares and below were; " West Bukusu 947 (15.9 percent of the total); Elgon, 456 (19 percent); Kimilili 930 (30.1 percent) and Ndivisi 999 (25.3 percent)."<sup>82</sup> Therefore, the problem of landlessness means that both men and women, young and old have to sell their labour to exist, and non-farm sector enterprises have become the only way out for the women. Certainly, lack of alternative employment opportunities has also forced the youth to participate in non-farm sector activities to earn some cash income to cope with the demands of basic needs.

---

<sup>80</sup> ROK, Kakamega District Development Plan, p.54.

<sup>81</sup> In addition, all these small plots are concentrated in the three divisions of Kavujai, Kimilili and Mt. Elgon. In Tongaren division all plots were above six hectares each. For details, see ROK, Bungoma Development 1979-83, p.22

<sup>82</sup> The Bungoma Development Plan further observed that " the number of small plots is directly related to the soil patterns as well as the intensity of agricultural activities. Elgon, Kimilili and Ndivisi fall under high potential zone and intensive farming is practised to a reasonably high degree in the last two locations." For more information see, pp.22-23.

"Big Women": Two Case Studies

The general picture conveyed in this chapter is that of women struggling in highly competitive conditions, trading in minimal quantities at marginal profits and making small improvements in their situations. A few women in Western Province, however, were remarkably successful, developing large-scale trade and moving their investments into other economic activities. They represent fascinating cases of women who succeeded in breaking out entirely from their subordinate status. Such women are often reluctant to speak of their activities, and jealous of their trade secrets. I was, however, able to obtain information from two of them, both of whom bound me not to reveal their identities. I have therefore attributed fictitious names to them.

The first I shall call Halima. She is a very kind woman and was willing to discuss her business history with me, including her commercial manoeuvres. She declared herself unable to indicate, or even to estimate, the amount of money which she handles. "This", she said, "is the kind of information I cannot even tell my own children. It is dangerous."

Halima is 51 years old. She only received three years of formal education. She came to Bungoma town with her husband in 1965. The husband owned one of the retail shops in Bungoma town. In 1973, her husband died. She took over the business.

The business thrived and turned into a wholesale store for the entire township. Halima has six children. They all participate in the business. In fact, when Chepkupe, (a well known market because of its coffee smuggling (magendo economy) was set up in 1976, Halima and her children participated. They bought and sold lorries of coffee. Halima is well known in the entire province because of her smuggling activities. She meets the needs of Uganda businessmen and women. She sells Omo (washing detergent), rice, cooking fats (Kimbo, Cow Boy {cooking fat}), and Blue Band (margarine). She stocks East African industries products. She sends lorryfuls of sugar and tea-leaves to Uganda. She sells in Uganda.<sup>83</sup> For Halima smuggling across the Kenya/Uganda border has contributed significantly to the growth of her business. Her business policy is to "look for money in all corners. If there is more money in Uganda, I will go for it." Her business skill and her ability to exploit the labour of her children has enabled Halima to become a successful businesswoman. Obviously, Halima's participation in smuggling activities has been crucial for the expansion of her business.

Mama Rhoda is 58 years old. She received four years of education. She was married in Butsoo before her husband, a District Co-operative Officer left her to stay with another woman in the settlement scheme. Mama Rhoda began selling

---

<sup>83</sup> Halima, Oral interview, 1988. This is a summary of my notes after interviewing Halima.

chikorokoro at the Kakamega Municipal market in 1970. Her daughter Rhoda, a nurse married to a teacher started her off with a gift of Kshs. 800. Later she hired a stall in the municipal market for which she paid Kshs. 75, a month. When the Municipal Council opened commercial plots, Mama Rhoda bought one of them and built a shop, where she opened a retail business. The plot is called a corner shop today with a hotel, a butchery and a grinding mill. All these are her property. She deals with maize flour, sells clothes, handbags, shoes which she buys from Uganda and transports to Kisumu, Nakuru and to Nairobi using her Toyota pick-up.<sup>84</sup>

Clearly, trade is a good source of income for women. These two cases are, however, exceptional. These women are "giant" businesswomen in Western Province. But they prove that women left on their own can be very enterprising individuals. Other cases provided by Kongsted and Monsted illustrate the legal problems of women in rural areas in relation to divorce and ownership of land.<sup>85</sup> For some women, trade is a full-time undertaking; it is for Halima and Mama Rhoda.

For "big women" business has completely transformed their life styles. They command a lot of authority because they are owners of property which ordinary men cannot own and are also

---

<sup>84</sup> Mama Rhoda, (not her real name), oral interview, Kakamega municipal market, 1988.

<sup>85</sup> Kongsted and Monsted, Trade and Family Labour in Western Kenya, pp.124-128.

employers of male labour. This gives them a special position and a new status in society. Both Mama Rhoda and Halima lost their husbands. Possibly this helped them. The two cases of "big women" demonstrate that successful female entrepreneurs enjoyed freedom from male control than average women. For Mama Rhoda, polygamy helped her because it led to her separation with her husband. However, individual initiative is, of course, important.

### Conclusion

In this chapter it has been argued that colonial government neglected the development of women's education, which resulted in low female participation in formal western education. As a result, women were largely excluded from formal wage employment opportunities. Since the majority of women were illiterate, the only alternative source of income open to them has been the rural and urban informal sector activities.<sup>86</sup> Women's participation in the informal sector activities creates a form of self-employment for them which can be combined with their other domestic reproductive responsibilities.

---

<sup>86</sup> In a study of Ga women in Ghana, Claire Robertson aptly argued that, "women must trade because of their lack of other opportunities, not only due to the state of the economy but also to their lack of access to formal education of the same type as men can obtain. Both formal and informal education are critical in determining women's fate and their class position." For details, see Sharing the Same Bowl, p.137.



Cultural practices inherited from the pre-colonial indigenous patriarchal norms were reinforced by colonial patriarchal forms which created unequal opportunity structures between female and male in education and employment. Female education was neglected in favour of education for males by parents, missionary and colonial officials. Although education was important for modern sector formal employment, women's lack of or low achievement in education left them handicapped to enter the modern labour market. As a result, alternative survival strategies were devised which women manipulated to develop independent cash income.

Women's participation in rural non-farm sector activities was and is, a form of survival strategy given their educational limitations and inability to get formal employment. The establishment and expansion of rural open-air markets facilitated women's participation in rural non-farm sector activities. The difference in the status of women traders was reflected in the quality and quantity of goods marketed.

However women experienced many problems and constraints in their participation in rural non-farm sector activities. Women lacked modern formal education, which limited their ability to maintain an accurate record of their activities yet they did so in their heads. Nevertheless keeping all records in the head may surely limit the expansion of the business beyond a certain maximum. Finally, most women were

concentrated in the same category of activities and as a result, competition has been extremely intensive. As a result of these problems, women have devised other forms of survival strategies which have enabled them to initiate and participate in rural development activities.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Self-Reliant Development in Kenya: Women's Survival Strategies in Rural Economy, Western Province 1945-1985

In the previous chapter the subjective responses of women, in the form of individual survival strategies, particularly in the development of petty trading, were examined. It was in the nature of such trading that it should be highly competitive and therefore such responses could not develop into forms of organised cooperation among women. At another level, however, women's organisations did develop, undertaking widespread activities which were collective in nature and designed both to increase women's incomes and undertake important work of social development directed at the improvement of their position. This collective response of women developed from a precolonial propensity to organise bands of women for labour, but with the passage of time and the increasingly complex character of the colonial economy women's organisations developed a broad collective approach to women's issues, with great sophistication, skilled leadership and strong social awareness. These groups were remarkably successful in implementing their strategies for survival.

A growing body of the rich historiography on African women's organisations (popularly referred to as "groups" in Kenya) shows that a considerable range of achievements have been accomplished by them. Indeed, the nature and functions of women's groups have been analysed in a variety of rural and

urban contexts, including Western Province.<sup>1</sup> However, scholars who have examined the role of women's groups in Kenya's rural and urban areas have developed a number of different interpretations of the subject. Indeed, all agree with Staudt that women's groups have had important consequences for women's ability to gain access to and control over resources, and that "Africa is the world region with the most extensive female solidarity organisations, and indication of the importance among women of ties outside household boundaries."<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> K. S. March, and R. L. Taqqu, Women's Informal Associations in Developing Countries: Catalysts for Change? (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1986). March and Taqqu provides an overview of the potential role of women's groups (associations) in development. Similarly, Mwaniki Nyaga, "Against many odds: the dilemmas of women's self-help groups in Mbeere, Kenya," Africa Vol. 56 no.2, 1986: pp. 210-26. Nici Nelson "Women must help each other" in Patricia Caplan and Janet M. Bujra (eds), Women United, Women Divided, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), pp.77-98. She examined the role of women's groups in Nairobi's poor urban residential area: Mathare Valley. Patricia Stamp, "Kikuyu women's self-help groups: towards an understanding of the relation between sex-gender system and the mode of production in Africa" in Claire Robertson and Iris Berger (eds.), Women and Class in Africa, (New York: Africana Publishing co., 1986), pp.27-46. Kathleen Staudt, "Sex, ethnic and class consciousness in Western Kenya" in Comparative Politics, Vol. 14 No.2, 1982, pp.149-67. See also Staudt, "Stratification, implications for women's politics" in Claire Robertson and Iris Berger, (eds.), Women and Class in Africa, pp.197-215. Barbara Thomas Politics, Participation and Poverty: Development through Self-Help in Kenya, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1985). See also Barbara Thomas, "Household Strategies for Adaption and Change: Participation in Kenyan Rural Women's Associations," Africa, 58 (4), 1988, pp.401-422.

<sup>2</sup> Kathlyn Staudt, "Stratification, implications for women's politics," p.199.

Women's Groups in Kenya.

Studies of women's groups both in Africa and Kenya have produced a wide range of differing interpretations. Patricia Stamp, for instance regards women's groups as " the source of the most radical consciousness to be found in the countryside providing women with a basis for resistance to exploitation."<sup>3</sup> This may be true for women in Kiambu District in Central Kenya where Stamp's study was conducted. Class differentiation among women has increasingly deepened the exploitation of women by women as well as by men, and has undermined women's solidarity. In fact as Janet M. Bujra explains:

The form taken by women's oppression is not only historically specific, but also class specific. Within any stratified society, it is clear that some women are more oppressed than others, and indeed, some women may themselves be engaged in oppression.<sup>4</sup>

As some rural households prospered, the wives and daughters of middle peasants were able to delegate the major responsibilities of domestic labour. As K. Staudt notes, "paradoxically, increasing agricultural commercialization strengthened solidarity among women by providing female control over resources around which to organise, yet at the same time undermined solidarity through class differentiation,

---

<sup>3</sup> Stamp, "Kikuyu Women's Self-Help Groups," p.42.

<sup>4</sup> Bujra, "Introductory" p. 27.

economic disparities and inequalities."<sup>5</sup> Organised resistance to female exploitation was not in the interest of all women. Consequently class differentiation weakened female solidarity.

However, a growing body of evidence suggests another interpretation. Class differentiation among women seemed to provide an elite leadership in the early stages which did not exploit the mass of women for class advantage but rather the elite (white women and later the literate Kenyan women) genuinely strove to improve the lot of the mass of poorer women. Indeed, gender solidarity was crucial as a unifying factor among women and therefore overrode the issue of class differentiation. This also helps to explain the presence, early participation and leadership provided by white women which suggests that for them even racial exclusivity was overcome by their discovery of gender solidarity in the 1950's.

In Kenya, class differentiation affected women and women's groups. Fred Kubia, then Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Labour, emphasized the significance of class differentiation among Kenyan women when he stated:

Our women are too 'high.' They have lost touch with the ordinary women in the street and they cannot truthfully say they represent them. It is difficult for a sophisticated woman to really remain in touch with the more simple one, and in fact ordinary women do not recognise the claims of those who say they are representing them.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Staudt, "Ethnic and Class Consciousness" p. 162.

<sup>6</sup> Sunday Post, August 23, 1964.

As a result, although poor rural women were the most numerous and disadvantaged of all categories, "women's groups tend to be composed disproportionately of the 'better off' women."<sup>7</sup> In addition, the World Bank country study on Kenya notes that, "these groups involve women with different incomes, education and background in efforts to increase incomes, promote savings and improve family health and welfare."<sup>8</sup> But, as Mette Monsted points out, "the poorest families, the landless labourers and the single women are under-represented in the women's groups."<sup>9</sup> This evidence casts

---

<sup>7</sup> Rayah Feldman, "Women's Groups and Subordination: An Analysis of Policies Towards Rural Women in Kenya" in Review of African Political Economy, No. 27/28, 1983, p. 77. Feldman further argues that women from poor rural households were unable to participate in women's group activities because of the demand on time and membership contributions which excluded poorer women. Further, a women's bureau survey of 1978 indicated that, there were then over 8,000 women's groups in Kenya with a total membership of over 300,000 women. This represented just over 11 per cent of all Kenyan African women above the age of 20. For more details see, Information on the Women's Bureau, Ministry of Housing and Social Services, mimeo, May 1978, revised August 1979.

<sup>8</sup> The World Bank Country study, Kenya: The Role of Women in Economic Development, (Washington D.C: World Bank, 1989), p.xx.

<sup>9</sup> Mette Monsted, "Women's Groups in Rural Kenya and their Role in Development" mimeo, Centre For Development Research, Copenhagen, 1978. Monsted further observed that, poorer women bore an increased burden of work since richer farmers were able to hire labour to either supplement or replace family labour. Indeed, the poorer women were likely to be the unrecorded source of such additional labour." For more details on poor female labour exploitation see chapter 2 of this study and Gavin Kitching's Class and Economic Change in Kenya. In Kenya, the censuses of 1969 and 1979 indicated that the proportion of female-headed households rose from 24 per cent in 1969 to 32 per cent in 1979. For an analysis, see the Ministry of Finance and Planning, Central Bureau of

doubt on Patricia Stamp's view that women's groups were a foci for organised resistance against male and some female exploitation of all women.<sup>10</sup> My own study in Western Province confirms this, and concurs in many ways with Barbara Thomas's treatment of women's groups as above all "the household strategy for survival. Women's associations assist women to solve two most fundamental constraints faced by African peasants: shortages of cash and shortages of labour"<sup>11</sup>

While I concur with Thomas's views, she is, I believe, unduly sanguine about policy support. In Western Province, some groups have managed to obtain considerable amounts of financial assistance from government departments, parastatals, and international non-governmental organisations (NGOS), to

---

Statistics, Government Printer, 1978, Women in Kenya, (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1985), pp.7-8. Republic of Kenya, Women of Kenya, Review and Evaluation of progress, (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1985), p.5. Thus, in 1979, almost 1 million out of the three million households in Kenya were headed by women. In addition, in single-headed households the woman was either divorced or the husband was deceased or absent for long periods or had never been there in the first place as in the case of unmarried mothers. And, the World bank country study adds, "female-headed households are typically poorer....rural families are increasingly likely to be headed de facto by women, roughly two-fifths of families are, for practical purposes, headed by women, and many others rely on women much of the time. The root cause of this shift is economic. For details, see World Bank, Women in Development, p. xiii, para.12.

<sup>10</sup> Stamp, "Kikuyu Women's Self-Help Groups," p.42

<sup>11</sup> Thomas, "Household Strategies for Adaptation and Change," pp.413-415.



finance their projects and businesses. But in practice women have not benefitted from adequate policy support, particularly in respect to land, technology, credit and agricultural inputs such as fertilizers and seeds.<sup>12</sup> Financial credit or loans are extended to women's groups in a collectivity rather than to individuals. However in the final analysis, individual members benefit from such loans and credit facilities. Consequently, through the activities of women's groups and through participation in group activities, some women have attained a limited degree of economic independence.

Other scholars have examined the role of women's groups in rural development. Rahay Feldman pointed out that, "the problem for women and in particular rural women, is not one of lack of involvement in development, it is rather a combination of a development emphasis which both confined them to poverty and their general subordination as women."<sup>13</sup> Women's

---

<sup>12</sup> ICPE, p.17 adds that, women do not have adequate access to the factors of production, to land, credit and other tools to raise their productivity. For details on women's lack of access to land, see chapter 5.

<sup>13</sup> Feldman, "Women's Groups and Subordination" pp.70-71. 'While women single-handedly run 24-32 per cent of rural households in Kenya, only 5 per cent of women own land in their own name. In addition, the pressures which confine them to domestic and subsistence activities to subsidize male wage labour deprive them of any alternative source of livelihood, except under the most insecure and exploitative conditions.' In addition, Beneria and Roldan argued that women's marginalization in the development process has been generated by several factors, some of which are gender-related, others derive from a pattern of growth that systematically generates acute class differences and social hierarchies. For details, see L.Beneria and M.Roldan, Crossroads of Class and Gender: Industrial Homework, Subcontracting, and Household Dynamics in

organisations are a way out of this. As Barbara Herz suggested, women's groups can positively reap the benefits of economic development by: "1) bringing services physically closer to women, 2) involving women more in the design, management and delivery of services and 3) strengthening and working with women's groups as contact points and to give women greater influence."<sup>14</sup> Women's groups can initiate appropriate survival strategies for generating income and other activities. This explains women's groups' determination to initiate rural development projects which focus specifically on their felt needs and for the benefit of women and the rural communities in general. This has been the main objective of women's groups in rural self-reliant development in Kenya.

Through participation in women's group activities, women identify their own critical economic, cultural, psychological and educational needs. These include, "lightening their workload, increasing their access to income, recognising their already considerable contribution to economic and social life,

---

Mexico City, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 7.

<sup>14</sup> Barbara Herz, "Bringing women into the economic mainstream" in IMF and World Bank, Finance and Development, (Washington D.C: IMF and the International Bank of Reconstruction and Development, December, 1989), p.23. This is also the official stand of the World Bank.

education as a liberating force and health"<sup>15</sup> Women in Kenya and other African countries have come to believe that women's felt needs can only be solved through participation in women's group activities.

Obviously women are not some vast untapped resource to be integrated into, or maximized for, rural development.<sup>16</sup> Women are already participating in essential ways in agriculture and in the necessary work of reproduction and caring for people's basic needs. This work and the knowledge women possess, must be recognised and valued.<sup>17</sup> Definitely, the question is not integrating women in development because

---

<sup>15</sup> Asian and Pacific Centre for Women in Development, The Critical Needs of Women, (Kuala Lumpur: Asian and Pacific Centre for Women in Development, 1977), pp.5-6. In addition, "the structural, financial and attitudinal change which must occur to satisfy women's needs and to enable them to contribute their extensive skills and talents will only come about as the result of strong and effective pressure groups. Thus, women must be mobilised and organised." p.37.

<sup>16</sup> United Nations, "The concept of self-reliance and the integration of women into development," for example argues that self-reliance should be seen rather as a search for an integrative concept of development... Within this framework, the integration of women in development through technical co-operation among developing countries is being given particular attention. See World Survey on the Role of Women in Development, (New York: United Nations, 1986), pp.210-211.

<sup>17</sup> Barbara Rogers identified the prejudices that male development planners have about women as a cause of the discrimination against women in development programs. For a more thorough analysis, see Rogers, The Domestication of women: Discrimination in Developing Societies, (London: Tavistock Publishers, 1980). And Marilee Karl adds, "the failure to include women in development on equal terms stems from the monopoly by males of development planning, administrative, legislative and juridical posts," Karl, "Women and Rural Development," p.76.

women are already over-integrated in rural development activities. In Kenya rural development projects are initiated through the efforts and active participation of women in groups.

### Origin of Women's Groups in Western Province

Literature on women's organisations in Africa has revealed that collective action is not new among African women.<sup>18</sup> In fact, women's work parties existed in Kenya long before the establishment of colonial rule. As the 'ILO study on Women's Employment Patterns' in Kenya aptly points out:

Kenya has a long history of women's mutual-aid groups. Indeed, across most of the cultural groupings in Kenya such groups have always existed, normally along kinship lines for the purpose of sharing or celebrating occasions such as births, deaths, marriages and so forth in addition to providing each other with communal labour, be it in tilling land, planting or such like. Their activities were thus mostly confined to those then considered feminine ones within the familial framework.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> Boserup, Women's Role in Economic Development, Nelson, "Women Must Help Each Other," Stamp, "Kikuyu Women's Self-Help Groups," Strobel Muslim Women in Mombasa, Strobel, "From Lelemama to lobbying: Women's Associations in Mombasa Kenya" in Hafkin N. and Bay E., (eds.), Women in Africa: Studies in Social and Economic Change, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976). See Also A. Wipper, "Rural Women: Development or Underdevelopment?" Special edition, Rural Africana 29 Winter, 1975-6. World Bank, Kenya: Women in Development.

<sup>19</sup> International Labour Organisation (ILO), Women's Employment Patterns, Discrimination and Promotion of Equality in Africa: The Case of Kenya, (Addis Ababa: ILO, Jobs and Skills Programme for Africa, 1986), p.130.

Similarly, Feldman correctly states:

stemming partly from the colonial establishment of women's groups in some parts of Kenya and partly from traditions of women's work parties and rotating credit associations created in response to their common position in the agricultural division of labour, women's groups have come to be seen as the chief, if not only, means of improving the position of rural women in Kenya.<sup>20</sup>

The origin of women's groups can be traced back to the pre-colonial period.<sup>21</sup> In Kenya, traditional women's work parties emerged in response to women's position in their communities' gender division of labour. As we have seen, among the Abaluhya communities of Western Province this division of labour required women to perform most agricultural activities. Women's work parties were organised on a village basis and neighbourhood level. They helped women to fulfill certain crucial labour activities in their individual households, particularly during peak labour seasons. As some informants remarked, "women like to work together in small groups (mumikanda).<sup>22</sup> In this way, work became less tedious and monotonous as it was interspersed with occasional conversations. A little local discussion did much to revive a flagging spirit. Thus women's work parties alleviated the

---

<sup>20</sup> Feldman, "Women's Groups and Subordination" p. 68.

<sup>21</sup> Patricia Stamp observed that, 'while informants stressed that the old style ndundu no longer existed, it is clear that the self-help groups are successors to these organisations, op.cit., p. 40.

<sup>22</sup> Julia Namuleyi, Raeli Nabalayo, Marita Munoko, Oral Interviews, (Bungoma and Kakamega, 1987-1988).

burden of women in agricultural activities and other household tasks. By the 1940s, the need for this teamwork increased as a result of expanded commodity production in the absence of adult and male children who had migrated to European settler farms and urban centres.<sup>23</sup> Women in Western Province struggled with heavy agricultural labour demands, and group work parties were one of the solutions they turned to.

Women's labour is a key resource which women have increasingly come to manipulate in a variety of ways. Indeed, as March and Taqqu observed, "the basic scaffolding that upholds women's economic strategies is built in turn upon their resources, such as the property women inherit and constraints such as those structured by sexual divisions of labour. These are the elements that shape the ways in which women organise themselves and their labour."<sup>24</sup> This underscores the significance of the traditional gender division of labour in society. The main economic resource

---

<sup>23</sup> For more details see chapter 2. Margaret J. Hay in a well documented study shows how the combined policies of colonial states and the missionary churches created a "nearly impossible situation," the real burden of which "in the rural areas of western Kenya fell on women, who remained at home while their husbands and sons sought outside employment. For details, see Margaret J. Hay, "Luo women and economic change during the colonial period" in N. Hafkin and E. Bay, (eds.), Women in Africa: Studies in social and economic change. (Stanford: Stanford University press, 1976), p. 87.

<sup>24</sup> March and Taqqu, Women's Informal Associations, p. 48. In addition, March and Taqqu noted, "women and men typically inherit and control different economic resources. The kind of property which individuals control affects not only the economic resource base with which they must work but also patterns their economic associations with others."

available to women was obviously their own labour, and the earliest women's associations were based on this resource. These were mainly rotating labour work groups.

Women's organisations grew out of co-operative processes. These organisations were social-economic welfare groups. Women's work parties also disseminated information on agricultural activities and skills on basketry, weaving and pottery. Some women were much better cultivators than others or as one informant recalled, "some women know how to cultivate well."<sup>25</sup> Groups helped to make lazy women who did not cultivate well, perform better.<sup>26</sup> A woman who was habitually lazy was despised. She began work late in the day and then worked for a few hours without making progress. However, in a group (Mumikanda) such women received encouragement to work hard. Thus women's groups encouraged efficiency and shared the burdens of work through mutual aid and co-operation.

In Western Province, women were engaged in a variety of extensive organisational activities including mutual-aid groups (Bulala or Obuhambani) and communal rotating work groups, (Kimikanda) for agricultural functions like planting, weeding, harvesting and transporting the crops to the appropriate place for storage. Women's groups acted as

---

<sup>25</sup> Margaret Mulia, oral interview, 2/3/1988, Ndalulungoma, Bungoma.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.,

centres for disseminating social-cultural, economic and agricultural information. The motto of women was: "women must help each other: unity is strength"<sup>27</sup> Women therefore initiated co-operative arrangements which enabled them to perform many of their household tasks effectively.

In other parts of Kenya, there were a variety of different women's groups. In Mombasa, Kenya, traditional lelemama dance societies, popular among Muslim women until the 1950s, enabled women to respond dynamically to change. Strobel has argued that lelemama associations provided women with an "alternative set of status distinctions and rewards apart from descent. (Dance groups) offered prestige to women who had few other sources of dignity and honour"<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, Nici Nelson has demonstrated that women who work in the same occupation co-operate to meet explicit economic needs and in the process expand their effectiveness and influence. Using the women beer brewers of Kenya's Mathare Valley, Nelson observed that women brewers relied on network connections for the "buying and selling of busaa (locally brewed beer using maize and yeast) wholesale and obtaining extended credit,

---

<sup>27</sup> Julia Namuleyi, Oral interview, 6/12/1987, Lugari, Kakamega.

<sup>28</sup> Strobel, "From lelemama to lobbying" p.192. In addition Strobel has noted that the lelemama associations actually stimulated women to adopt new attitudes and promoted a certain amount of change through various means. They encouraged the acquisition of new skills by providing a focal point for mobilisation of people, finances and equipment at times of celebration.



exchanging information concerning the reliability of credit customers (male and female), putting up bail and collecting money for fines, and extended help in serious emergencies"<sup>29</sup> The two examples clearly demonstrate the diversity of women's groups in Kenya, as well as their social-cultural, economic and political functions.

Women's groups did not reduce women's workload. Women participated in group activities in addition to their individual small scale farm labours. In most cases, women's participation in group activities competed for the same limited time with other domestic chores and responsibilities. This situation deteriorated further as increasing numbers of children attended school and as male migration intensified.

---

<sup>29</sup> Nici Nelson, "Women must help each other" pp. 77-98. See particularly p.86. Similar studies on women associations have also been done in West Africa. For instance, Judith Van Allen noted that, 'wives of the village' were the core organisers of mikiri, "the gatherings which performed the major role in self-rule among women and which articulated women's interests as opposed to those of men" (emphasis in the original). For more details see, Judith Van Allen, "Sitting on a man: colonialism and the lost political institutions of Igbo women" in Canadian Journal of African Studies, vol.6, no.2, 1972, pp. 165-181. See particularly p.168 The mikiri meetings were particularly important in regulating women's trading and the markets by establishing dates, prices, market rituals, and other rules regarding the markets. But, the mikiri extended their authority and power into many aspects of West African life: a man's mistreatment of the wife, sexual insults directed at women could all motivate mikiri intervention. Okonjo Kamene for instance pointed out, "the kinship based association of the 'daughters of the village' is paralleled by another equally important association the 'wives of the village' For details, see Okonjo Kamene, "The dual-sex political system in operation: Igbo women and community politics in Midwestern Nigeria" in N.Hafkin and E. Bay, African Women, pp. 45-58.

For instance, whereas at independence in 1963 in Kenya, fewer than 900,000 Kenyan children were in primary school, 34 percent of whom were girls, by 1986 some 4.8 million Kenyan children were in primary school, some 48 percent of whom were girls.<sup>30</sup> Traditionally, children particularly, girls, assisted their mothers with domestic chores. Children's school attendance therefore led to the withdrawal of child labour which rural women had utilized. Clearly, increased school attendance intensified the burden on rural women.

However, women's groups offered some collective labour for women. March and Taggu suggest, "the various features of all these forms of rotating labour, whether personal exchanges, work parties, or rotating labour associations, constitute a creative model for development planning"<sup>31</sup> Women's organisations provided a focus for economic, social and cultural adaptations to change and development for women in the rural areas. Women's organisations assisted women to

---

<sup>30</sup> International Labour Organisation, Youth Employment and Youth Employment Programmes in Africa: A Comparative Sub-regional Study, the case of Kenya, (ILO, Jobs and Skills Programme for Africa (JASPA), Addis Abbaba, 1986), pp.6-10, and ILO, Women's Employment Patterns, Discrimination and Promotion of Equality in Africa: The Case of Kenya, (JASP, Addis Abba, 1986), pp. 42-49. See also, World Bank, Kenya: The Role of Women in Economic Development (World Bank, Washington D.C, 1989), pp. 135-140.

<sup>31</sup> March and Taggu, Women's Informal Associations, p.59. In addition, March and Taggu observed that, "to plan economic changes which will reach women, and help redistribute wealth equitably among poor women, then, those women's informal associations which actively promote the economic interests of all members should prove a good model to follow" p.65.

acquire knowledge, skills and economic independence through participation in group activities. This enhanced and facilitated development in the rural areas.

The objectives and economic activities of different women's groups varied but the general emphasis was to improve the economic status of women. The presence of cash seems to have enhanced women's group processes. As women began to acquire money through trading activities, the desire to establish some control over that money increased. Hence, a number of new functions and economic activities began to emerge. The groups initiated during the colonial period enabled members to cope with changing economic conditions. Consequently, in the 1950s, several women's groups were formed under the umbrella of 'maendeleo ya wanawake' organisation (women's progress).

**Kimikanda: Women's rotating Labour Work Parties, 1940-1963.**

Communal labour groups (Kimikanda), which performed agricultural activities, were organised on a residential basis. Participants generally numbered between six and twenty people. The members used to plant, weed and harvest for individual members during peak labour seasons. Members who

failed to turn up for the work assignment compensated for their absence with cash.<sup>32</sup> This ensured group discipline.

Group functions were formalised and included a chair person, secretary, a treasurer and an 'askari' (a kind of warder). The 'askari' blew a whistle or rang a bell on the days of work. This was a missionary influence because a bell was usually rung to remind the believers that Sunday service was about to start. Women's work parties used this to their advantage. The 'askari' was also responsible for organising members on the day of work. The secretary, a semi-illiterate lady, recorded the names of those who failed to turn up on assignment days and theoretically served as a check on the treasurer.<sup>33</sup>

Kimikanda groups worked for an average of about five hours a day, four days a week. The day's work started early before the sun became hot. Women were more willing to co-operate in garden work than men, for there were no similar

---

<sup>32</sup> Elizabeth Naliaka, Oral interview, Kimlili, 20/3/1988, Bungoma. In addition, kimikanda women's work parties of the 1940s were slightly different from the communal labour teams. The difference was that in the communal work party, an individual or household in need of assistance calls in friends, neighbours, and relations for some particularly labour intensive task, like planting or harvesting at peak seasons. Typically, the work party is feasted but not actually paid for their labour. The sponsor assumes that she or he will be asked to participate in a reciprocal work party at some time, but the exchange is casual and open-ended. See March and Taggu, Women's Informal Associations, p.55.

<sup>33</sup> Marita Munoko, Oral interview, Sirisia, 12/10/1987, Bungoma.

men's organisations. In polygamous families, each wife was essentially an independent economic unit with her own gardens and grainstores. Yet, in such families, wives assisted each other in the work of their respective gardens in turns.<sup>34</sup> This was necessary because agricultural work was not evenly distributed throughout the year. Furthermore, the busiest periods were those in which the hardest tasks were performed. Co-operative labour was therefore a strategy which women developed to solve the problems of increased responsibility in agricultural work, made worse by labour migration.

Although Kimikanda (pl) women's groups were outgrowths of earlier organisations, by the 1940s they had acquired new functions. The members of a particular kumukanda (sing.) group could be hired out to work for cash, which means that, some of these groups were money making (income-generating) organisations. Accumulation of capital was difficult for women, who had marginal economic resources and many responsibilities. Informal mutual aid networks (Kimikanda) offered help. The interpersonal bonds underlying those informal associations were crucial for these women's survival.<sup>35</sup> The cash earned from such collective work was kept by the treasurer and was later shared among members at the end of the agricultural period. The Kimikanda groups,

---

<sup>34</sup> Raeli Nabalayo, oral interview, Butonge, 14/4/1988, Bungoma.

<sup>35</sup> March and Taggu, Women's Informal Associations, p.65.

thus permitted women to establish some limited control over their labour and its products.

Work parties performed other social welfare functions simultaneously. Women's collective spirit was particularly important for reproductive activities such as childbirth, childcare and social functions like weddings, or during a prolonged illness in a family and funeral ceremonies, where members of a group assisted each other.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, childbirth is one moment in a woman's life cycle which requires the assistance of other women. At childbirth, women in the neighbourhood fetched water, collected firewood, vegetables and prepared food for the woman who had delivered and took care of all her domestic responsibilities. This kind of domestic teamwork was based on a balanced reciprocity. Ritual feasts related to childbirth were also prepared by women in the neighbourhood through this teamwork spirit. This was particularly true in situations where a woman gave birth to twins. Childcare services were also undertaken collectively by women. One elderly woman explained:

---

<sup>36</sup> Describing women's groups among the Kikuyu, in central Kenya, Stamp noted, 'the ten groups in the sublocation perform the traditional functions of cooperative cultivation, ngwatio, and cooperative household management for women in childbirth, matega.... Matega continues to provide group help to members - for weddings and funeral, as well as childbirth, Stamp, "Women's Groups", p. 40. For details on (lelemama) women's work parties among the Coastal communities of Kenya, see Strobil, Muslim women in Mombasa. For details on women's cooperative labour, see Nyaga Mwaniki, "Against Many Odds: The Dilemmas of Women's Self-help Groups in Mbeere, Kenya." in Africa, vol.56, no.2, 1986, p.218.

During our time, it was easy to bring up children because mothers were more understanding and we generally used to look after our children collectively. Bringing up children was not a single woman's work. We assisted each other. In a village, a mother would leave her children with another woman to go and collect firewood in the forest or even fetch water from the river.<sup>37</sup>

Women turned to each other to fulfill their domestic obligations. Certainly, childbirth and childcare are the most demanding responsibilities in a woman's lifetime. Cooperative effort was therefore crucial particularly in the absence of modern clinics and day care centres (nursery schools).

Family catastrophes and ceremonies which involved the elaborate displays of communal festivities always activated women's networks as well. Funeral ceremonies, weddings and circumcision ceremonies among the Abaluhya of Western Province involved much feasting. Women's networks provided the labour and organisation needed to supply the necessary food. Death in a family is a domestic crisis which is not always adequately prepared for. The women's cooperative circle of support usually undertook the many tasks of cooking for the bereaved family, providing food and any other domestic requirements like firewood, water, vegetables and of course consoling and visiting the family. Similarly, during weddings, women's networks were called upon to cook food and generally assist the hostess to entertain her guests

---

<sup>37</sup> Florence Ayiela, oral interview, Bunyore, 8/11/1987, Kakamega.

satisfactorily. Women's networks fulfilled the emergency needs of the members temporarily and serially. They created important patterns of communication and exchange, which aided women both in crises and in daily life.

Female solidarity was based on shared domestic responsibilities in society, and thus reflected the gender division of labour in society. As one of the best East African poets, the late Okot p'Bitek, states, "woman of Africa, what are you not?"<sup>38</sup> Perhaps in this world of computer technology, the answer would be, an African woman is like a living mini-computer. The existence of women's work parties helped women to be efficient "mini-computers", who successfully fulfilled a multiplicity of reproductive and productive tasks using basic tools.

Kimikanda women's groups expanded their focus in response to changes in the colonial structure and economic reforms. Women were deeply concerned about the need to establish some form of economic independence as early as the 1940s. In Western Province, the organisation of women's egg cycle activities, which peaked during World War II, is worth investigating in this regard. Bulala women's groups functioned within the need to develop some economically viable income-generating activities. Women had increasingly come to realise the crucial need for economic security. Bulala

---

<sup>38</sup> Okot P'Bitek, Song of Lawino and Ocol, (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1971).



women's groups filled this need, but their desire to initiate development projects for local communities was equally important.

The Malakisi Women Advancing Council, 1949-1960.

The Malakisi Women Advancing Council demonstrate women's understanding of the need for organised group activities. It was started by the Malakisi Advisory Council which consisted of eighteen men and two women.<sup>39</sup> However, women thought that if they had their own group they could be able to develop and therefore improve their own economic status. The Malakisi Women Advancing Council was formed in 1949 with this objective in mind. Male members of the Council encouraged and supported the women's initiative. The Council was geared towards acquiring skills and knowledge to enable women to function more effectively and to improve the status and conditions of women in the community.

The Malakisi Women Advancing Council aimed to improve the socio-economic conditions of the Bukusu, Iteso and Kalenjin (Mt.Elgon) women in the Malakisi region. This was achieved through social interaction in group activities and functions. Group leadership was provided by the wives of the prominent people in the area and female school teachers. The Malakisi

---

<sup>39</sup> Ruth Barasa, one of the founder members of the Malakisi Women Advancing Council. She is also the wife of a former senior chief, oral interview, 7/2/1988, Sirisia (Bungoma).

Women Advancing Council recruited members from across ethnic boundaries, although membership was confined to women above twenty years of age. The membership fee was five Kenya shillings. Considering the general scarcity of money in the 1950s in the district, most women could not afford to pay the membership fee. As a result, most of the women who were members of this group were recruited from Christian families. The five shillings fee excluded poor women who needed the support of the group most. Furthermore, poor women were excluded by the requirement that members pay Kshs.20.00 as yearly subscription to the group. Consequently, the Malakisi Women Advancing Council consisted of women who were economically better-off. Most members had received some western education, although the level varied.

The projects and activities organised by this group emphasised women's needs first and then those of the society in general. The Malakisi Women Advancing Council wanted to build a dispensary, because women experienced many maternity problems. The nearest clinics were in Kaimosi, Kolanya, Kakamega and Tororo, all of them were located, at least 30 miles away except Kolonya. These long distances and the lack of efficient transportation, caused many mothers to deliver on the way to the clinics. This led to high mortality rates among women during child-birth.

Members of the Council therefore wanted the colonial government to assist them to build a dispensary at Sirisia.

In 1949, members of this group decided to contribute money to start their own clinic on a kind of harambee basis. The District Commissioner (D.C) for Bungoma, who was also the Chairman of the African Development Council (A.D.C) supported these women and hence the colonial government agreed to build a dispensary at Sirisia towards the end of 1949.

Through the activities of the MWAC, public health nurses and midwives worked closely with members of the group. Village representatives of the Council took nurses and midwives around their areas. This improved the quality of life in the area. It also created additional incentives for women to participate in and initiate more development projects.

By the time the government agreed to build Sirisia Dispensary, the members of the MWAC had contributed Kshs.200.00.<sup>40</sup> This money was later used in the construction of the present Sirisia social hall where the group used to meet. The hall was also used for adult literacy classes by women. Members of the Council initiated and participated in other projects such as the protection of springs, and construction of rural access roads and bridges. The Council constructed roads to most of the elementary schools in their area, which helped children get to school especially during the rainy seasons. The improved roads even improved school

---

<sup>40</sup> Ruth Barasa, oral interview, 1988.

standards because poor roads had kept inspectors away, leaving schools badly supervised.

Development of girls' education was another issue which concerned the Council. Girls faced many problems in terms of availability of schools and facilities to cater for their educational needs. In 1956, the Malakisi Women Advancing Council decided to put up a school for girls at Sirisia and members were asked to contribute money towards this endeavour. Construction work started, but because of mismanagement of funds, work stopped and the father of the Catholic mission at Sirisia continued the school's construction. However, poor attendance of girls led to the school's conversion to a boys school. This was recalled with much bitterness by former members of the Council.

The Council also had the responsibility of protecting water springs. Men used to clear the bush around the spring, while women collected stones used in the actual cementing of the spring. By 1956, a total of fourteen springs had been protected by the group.<sup>41</sup>

The Malakisi Women Advancing Council also organised lessons on child-care, home improvement activities and general home hygiene. In 1956, when Ruth Barasa and Irene Daudi came back from Kericho, where they had attended a home economics course, they began to teach the subject. Members of the

---

<sup>41</sup> Ruth Barasa and Marita Munoko, Oral interview Sirisia, 1988.

Council were taught how to construct good fire-cooking places, how to prepare balanced meals, how to construct suntables for drying dishes and utensils, given instruction in vegetable growing, nutrition, cookery, child-care, good home hygiene, knitting and sewing. Members of the Council used to make pots, baskets, and spin and weave towels and blankets.<sup>42</sup>

In 1959, the Council changed its name to the Malakisi Women Welfare Society. This change reflected the realisation that the organisation was primarily for social improvement purposes. The members also wanted to involve other women who had originally been excluded either because they were not Christians or because they could not afford the Council's fees. In 1959, membership fees were reduced to two shillings and the yearly subscription was reduced to ten shillings.

The example of the MWAC seems to undermine Fred Kobia's view that class divisions undermined the effectiveness of women's movements. It is clear that the MWAC was driven and led by relatively advantaged and literate women and that its fee structure excluded the mass of poor women. Yet it would clearly be unjust to accuse the organisation of using its influence for manipulative class purposes. The skills which it tried to spread by instruction were perhaps those of a developing "middle class" elite of women, yet they were also

---

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., Many kinds of activities were undertaken by Maendeleo ya wanawake women's groups, and in addition, the type of projects chosen by any particular group depended on the community's needs and the resources available to the group.

entirely practical, down to earth, useful and clearly designed to create social improvement and better health and hygiene for less fortunate sisters. The various, and significant, resources which the MWAC helped to pull into the interior were not those designed to serve the MWAC leadership alone, but of general use to women. Much of the activity, including work like that on wells and springs, served only poorer women and could not have been designed for self-serving purposes. The MWAC therefore, appears to have been an organisation in which an emerging elite of women were attempting to use the advantages of their class for the improvement of their entire sex, and not for further extension of their class advantages.

Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organisation in Kenya, 1952-1985.

By the 1950s, most of the traditional informal women's groups in Kenya had changed from working teams to income-generating activities. The concept existed in the pre-colonial period but was given a formal character and function in 1952 when 'maendeleo ya wanawake' (women's progress) was formed. This organisation formalized women's group activities. It focused mainly on women in rural areas and revolutionized, confirmed and strengthened women's participation in rural community development projects in Kenya.

The origins of maendeleo are not unique. Like women's organisations elsewhere in the Third World, the movement was influenced by the post-World War II colonial social development policies. At the Cambridge Conference of 1948 called, "The Encouragement of Initiative in African Society" (African No.1174), a new concept of development emphasizing "Community Development" emerged. The Secretary of State for the Colonies adopted the recommendations of the Cambridge Conference and defined community development as, " a movement designed to promote better living for the whole community with the active participation and, if possible, on the initiative of the community (emphasis mine).<sup>43</sup> This point has been largely ignored by previous studies on MYW movement in Kenya,<sup>44</sup> which have not placed MYW activities within the context of changing Colonial Office policies.

Colonial governments were encouraged to carry out the recommendations of the Cambridge Conference and to experiment freely with the new technique of community development. Social development in the colonies included:

all those measures which deal with the effects of change and progress on the individual human being and his place in the community. A programme of social development should also include means by

---

<sup>43</sup> CO 859/578, Social Development in the colonies, Revised October, 1953, Memo No.10, p.2

<sup>44</sup> Audrey Wipper, "The Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organisation: The Co-optation of Leadership," in African Studies Review 18, December, 1975, pp.99-120. See also A.Wipper, "The Women's Equal Rights Movement in Kenya" in the Journal of Modern African Studies, Vol. IX, No. 3, September, 1971.

which the individual and the community can be prepared both to adjust themselves to changing conditions and to play an active and intelligent part in implementing economic and political development.<sup>45</sup>

The principle of corporate effort had been stated and group work in rural areas was legitimised. Efforts towards formalisation of rural women's group activities were begun.

Institutionalisation of women's informal groups was long over-due. In Kenya, this occurred through the formation of Maendeleo Ya Wanawake (MYW) organisation. In fact, both African and European (British) women in colonial territories, such as Kenya, had a long history of concern with improving the quality of African women's living standards in the rural areas. They were already experimenting with informal group activities but they needed external support to give their activities a national dimension.

The activities of women's group work were also facilitated by the formation of the Sub-Committee on Work among Women by the Secretary of State for the Colonies. The sub-committee was given the mandate:

To keep under review the special needs of women and girls and the contribution they make in the field of social development in the colonial territories, and to recommend ways in which contact with and between voluntary organisations and other relevant resources in the United Kingdom and overseas could be established and sustained

---

<sup>45</sup> Wipper, "The Women's Equal Rights Movement in Kenya" *Ibid.*, p.5.



to stimulate progress in work among women in the colonial territories.<sup>46</sup>

In addition, the Sub-Committee on Women was important because, "the urgency of the problems to be dealt with required concerted action by everyone, including the women concerned, in raising the standard of living of colonial peoples."<sup>47</sup> The importance of women's contributions to social progress in the colonies was also underscored. As the report appropriately stated:

One of the greatest contributions women in the colonies are making to social progress is to demonstrate the fundamental fact that we are all, irrespective of race or creed, vitally concerned in improving social conditions wherever we may be living. European women who can help to produce that attitude of mind in colonial territories are doing most valuable voluntary service.<sup>48</sup>

Consequently, the Colonial Office and the Women's Corona Society were "increasingly being asked to arrange short training courses for both European and colonial women visiting the United Kingdom and the voluntary organisations in this country co-operate excellently in providing such courses. Many of the women arriving in this country are wives of prominent local officials and merchants."<sup>49</sup> The Cambridge

---

<sup>46</sup> CO 859/578, Social Development in Colonial Territories, Revised October 1953, p.5

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p.6.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p.6

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p.5. The Women's Corona Society was an association for the colonial officials' wives.

Conference concluded that the problems of social development were diversified and complicated. The Conference observed:

The most difficult problem lies in helping the people to adjust themselves to changing conditions- to cushion the effect of progress- and wherever possible to take steps to ensure that development schemes do not unduly aggravate the social disruption already apparent. The people themselves need to be made aware of the changes which are taking place and the reasons for them, they must be encouraged to play an active part in development projects. And perhaps understanding will only come through group action.<sup>50</sup>

The origin and activities of MYW organisation in Kenya should be seen within the wider context of the post-World War II social development policies in the colonial territories. A report on social development in the colonies for instance noted that, " women's organisations on the lines of the women's institutes movement in this country (United Kingdom) are proving particularly successful in Kenya, Malaysia, and

---

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

other territories with large and scattered populations."<sup>51</sup>

Furthermore, the report observed:

in the West Indies, there is a large number of women's voluntary organisations dealing with various aspects of group work, much of which is based on United Kingdom experience. The examples of the more comprehensive approach are found in such territories as the Gold Coast, Uganda and Jamaica. An example of effective work inspired by European welfare officers is seen in the Busoga district in Uganda where some 60 women's clubs have been inspired and directed to undertake simple courses in home economics, agriculture, literacy and so on.<sup>52</sup>

Maendeleo Ya Wanawake, which became the largest women's voluntary association in Kenya, was set up during the colonial period by a small group of European women to promote the advancement of African women and raise the African standard of living.<sup>53</sup> Based on the traditional women's work groups, MYW

---

<sup>51</sup> For details see, CO 859/578, Social Development in the Colonies, Revised October, 1953, Memo No. 10, p.5. In fact, voluntary organisations existed in Chile and Brazil, for example, national women's organisations were first constituted in the 1920s to fight for women's suffrage and other legal rights. They disappeared within the decade and were revitalized only after World War II for charity purposes. See Marianne Schmink, "Women in Brazilian Abertura Politics" in Signs 7, Autumn 1981, pp.115-134. Similar women's organisations existed in India. The All India Women's Conference (AIWC) was established in 1926. The aim of AIWC was to contribute to the general progress and welfare of women and children in India. For details, see Janet Self and Robert Girling, "Reaching poor women: Training plan for organisational development in India" Report prepared for USAID, India, 1983.

<sup>52</sup> CO 859/578, Social Development in the colonies, Revised memo No.10, 1953, p.5.

<sup>53</sup> Other large women's organisations in Kenya include the National Council of Women of Kenya (NCWK), which was formed in 1966. It has been struggling to acquire the status of the overall women's organisation in the country. It affiliates

was consolidated in 1952 by the wives of colonial administrators, missionaries and settlers.<sup>54</sup> Thus its origin was part of the post-war social development policies in the colonies. The co-ordination of MYW activities fell directly under the Ministry of Community Development and Rehabilitation. The Annual Report for the Federation of Social Services stated, "this movement, which is for the progress of African women, is under the direction of Nancy Shepherd, Assistant Commissioner for women and girls, Department of Community Development. The society joined the Federation of Social Services in Kenya in October, 1954."<sup>55</sup>

Twelve European and two African homecrafts officers were in charge of the clubs. European women provided the early supervision of the MYW clubs, but African women constituted the majority of the committee members. The ultimate goal was to prepare African women leaders to take up leadership positions in the organisation. This was achieved in 1959 when Pheobe Asiyo was elected as the first African chairperson of

---

with over 38 women's associations which include among others, the University Women's Association. For more details see, Republic of Kenya, Development Plan, 1974-1978, (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1975), pp.482-483.

<sup>54</sup> Wipper argues that if an organisation was concerned with home cleanliness, it means it considered women "socially backward." For details see Wipper, "Equal Rights for Women" p. 432.

<sup>55</sup> CO 822/1139, Extract from the Federation of Social Services, Annual Report, 1954, 'Maendeleo ya wanawake (progress of women).

MYW. To facilitate this transition, women from all over Kenya were sent to Jeanes School in Kabete where they were trained as club leaders. T.G.Askwith, the Commissioner for Community Development, reported that, "many trained African women leaders were working without pay, and some of the homecraft officers were also without remuneration. There was a great spirit among women to expand the movement, which enabled African women to raise their standard of living."<sup>56</sup> Rural women's groups provided the basis for most MYW organisation in Kenya.

The objectives of the MYW movement provided the basis for the rural women's participation in the organisation. Writing about MYW, Audrey Wipper stated that, "it is a self-help organisation concerned with change at the most fundamental level, the home. It aims to improve domestic standards by educating women in home-making, child care, nutrition and hygiene."<sup>57</sup> The activities of MYW organisation included sewing, cookery, child welfare, games, singing and dancing. The report on Kenya to the Advisory Committee on Social Development in Colonial Territories, remarked on "the striking results which had recently been achieved by community

---

<sup>56</sup> CO 822/1139, Extract from Kenya Newsletter, No.85, July, 1954.

<sup>57</sup> Wipper, "Equal Rights for Women" p.432.

development teams and the work of Maendeleo Ya Wanawake movement.<sup>58</sup>

The Colonial Office was greatly encouraged by the initial achievements made by MYW organisation in Kenya. As a result of Thompson's report on Kenya, the Colonial Office suggested that the government of Kenya should give attention to the following points:

(i) in the work of women's clubs, it appeared that emphasis required to be given to home hygiene and child welfare, rather than to arts and crafts, although the economic value of the latter was appreciated.

(ii) Efforts should be made to overcome resistance to the introduction of individual latrines.

(iii) The need for a bold plan to deal with homeless and abandoned children and the possibility of training local women to take part in this work.<sup>59</sup>

The first point reveals Colonial Office assumptions about women in the colonial territories. Colonial officials in Kenya generally ignored women's economic problems. Consequently, women sought alternative survival strategies which would reduce economic dependency on male patriarchs. Women were therefore more interested in the arts and crafts which the Colonial Office was neither willing to develop nor encourage.

---

<sup>58</sup> CO 822/1139, Advisory Committee on Social Development in Colonial Territories, Reports of Sub-Committee.

<sup>59</sup> CO 822/1139, Advisory Committee on Social Development in Colonial Territories Reports Sub-Committee, Extract from the draft minutes of the ninth meeting held on 19th September, 1955.

In Kenya, the growth of women's groups was quite remarkable. By 1954, Nancy Shepherd observed:

Tremendous expansion has taken place during the past two years and the number of African women's clubs now established is 508 with a membership of 36,970. It has its own newspaper produced in Luo, Kikamba, Kiswahili and Kikuyu which has a circulation of 18,000.<sup>60</sup>

Similarly, T.G.Askwith, in his address to a conference organised by the Ministry for Community Development and Rehabilitation explained:

The success of the movement depended primarily on the training of African leaders. In the early stages, this was all the government could provide in the way of assistance. Little by little, limited funds become available for the temporary employment of homecrafts officers, but the expansion of the movement continued. The growth was so rapid that it became extremely difficult to provide all the supervision, guidance and attention required.<sup>61</sup>

The growth of MYW groups was also because of the fact that the women's informal work parties formed the backbone of the movement. Women's informal groups existed. Maendeleo formalised these work parties. In addition, the chiefs, local headmen and African District Councillors increasingly recognised the advantages of the women's organisations. The increased number of trained African women leaders, and the assistance of several European women also helped.

---

<sup>60</sup> CO 822/1139, Press Office Handout No.970, August 24th, 1954. The present MYW magazine is called Voice of Women.

<sup>61</sup> CO 822/1139, Extract from the draft minutes of the ninth meeting of the Advisory Committee on Social Development in colonial territories, held on September, 19th, 1955.

Each member of the maendeleo groups paid a yearly club subscription fee of two shillings and received a membership card. However, when members proved themselves capable and loyal to the movement, they were given a badge. The subscription fee eliminated a substantial number of poor rural women, as pointed out by Mette Monsted, Janet Bujra and Barbara Thomas.<sup>62</sup> The subscription fees provided the roots of class differentiation within maendeleo organisation, both in rural and urban areas. Poor women were eliminated. As Wipper points out, "the broad basis of the movement lies, however, with progressive rural women. They may be traders, leaders of community clubs, members of marketing co-operatives, or simply mothers saving for school fees in the hope that their children will obtain an education."<sup>63</sup> Some women joined Kimikanda because they did not pay membership fees.

In rural areas where male out-migration was high, yet production of cash crops continued to increase, women responded enthusiastically to the formalisation of informal women's groups. Western Province, (then administered under Nyanza Province) was among the first areas where formal women's groups emerged as was seen with the Malakisi Women

---

<sup>62</sup> Monsted "Women's Groups in Rural Kenya", Thomas "Household Strategies for Adaption and Change" and Bujra Women United, Women Divided.

<sup>63</sup> Wipper, "Women's Equal Rights", p.430.



Advancing Council. MYW groups became so widespread that the 1954 Annual Report of Social Services observed:

The work has gained great momentum to an extent undreamed of by many and at present it is as much as we can do to keep pace. Indeed, in some places we cannot keep pace with the number of villages who wish to start MYW groups. This applies to nearly every district in Nyanza and Central Province. We cannot keep pace, because we have neither the homecraft officers nor the trained leaders who are essential if the movement is to continue along the right lines.<sup>64</sup>

In Western Province, efforts to facilitate the activities of MYW organisation were encouraged. Reports of the MYW activities in North Nyanza (now Western Province) noted that, "plans were made to combine women's homecraft centres with men's farmers co-operative unions wherever possible. For instance, co-operatives will purchase materials and possibly flour, sugar and other household requirements for sale to the members of the women's centres. Already, the plan is proving successful at Namwela in the North Bukusu area."<sup>65</sup> In addition, the report notes:

Four new women's homecrafts classes have been opened in the Kimilili-Elgon area of North Nyanza. A fifth class, which was closed a year ago, has

---

<sup>64</sup> CO 822/1139, Extract from the Federation of Social Services, Annual Report: Maendeleo ya wanawake (Progress of women), 1955. Nyanza and Central province were the chief labour supplying provinces in Kenya. They were also the key areas of food and peasant cash crop production areas in Kenya.

<sup>65</sup> CO 822/1139, Press Office Handout, No. 1450: New plans for homecraft centres in North Nyanza, November, 19th 1954. Namwela is located in the same administrative zone where the malakisi women advancing council thrived.

been reopened at Sabatia in Marama location. The broadening of the general course in these classes to include handwork, knitting and cutting out garments, as well as actual needle work. Teachers gave lectures on housewifery, cooking and laundry.<sup>66</sup>

The activities of women's informal groups were more consolidated in the present Sirisia division and the old Kimilili division in Bungoma district.<sup>67</sup>

The origins and early history of the MYW present the historian with some intriguing problems of interpretation, particularly of the role of European women in the early years. The stereotypical picture of the white woman which emerges from the historiography of places such as Kenya is that of the "memsahib", aloof, arrogant and determined to preserve husband and children from the "pollution" of contact with "native" society. Indeed the coming of European wives in India and Africa, it is often suggested, marked the arrival of rigid racism and segregation. If the stereotype of the white colonial woman was ever accurate, it was clearly breaking down in the 1950s with the emergence of a significant number of settler, missionary and officials' wives who appeared to be concerned enough to place gender-solidarity above racial exclusivity to the extent of donating considerable voluntary time and effort in working for the advancement of African women. Of course one could offer a cynical interpretation

---

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., November, 19th 1954.

<sup>67</sup> The old Kimilili division included the whole of the present Tongaren and Webuye divisions.

that this was simply a response to new conditions of colonialism and represented a racial "survival strategy" which replaced racial exclusivity by a new "colonial maternalism" designed to manipulate emerging African female consciousness in the interest of the white ruling class. The evidence of the MYW, however, hardly seems to sustain that analysis. The white women, like the African educated women of MWAC, were not pushing strategies which seemed to have much relevance to their class or racial interests. Their activities stressed self-help, not the need for white leadership, indeed from the first the white women successfully promoted the training of African women to assume leadership of the movement and appear to have offered no resistance to African women assuming directing roles in the organisation. In fact the smooth, almost casual transition from white to black leadership was in marked contrast to most other such transitions during decolonization which involved males. This does appear to be a case, at least for those white women involved in the MYW, of gender-solidarity overriding racial exclusivity as well as class interest.

#### Maendeleo Ya Wanawake and Its Expansion After Independence

In the post-independence era, women's groups became much more interested in development projects. When Kenya attained independence in 1963, women were much quicker than men to realise that political independence would not necessarily

translate into economic gains for them. Women well knew that the political process would be a male preserve. This explains the formation and mushrooming of women's groups in Kenya after 1963. At the local level, the activities of rural women's groups were co-ordinated by the MYW organisation. Audrey Wipper commented that, "the movement has weathered the change from colonial to independent status with the Africanisation of its leadership. New African women speak out forcibly for themselves."<sup>68</sup> Women's groups which emerged after 1963 were primarily concerned with income-generating activities, the only way that women could achieve some economic independence.

In Kenya, thousands of women's groups sprang up in rural areas. By 1964, there were about 1,200 women's groups in Kenya with a total of about 42,447 members. The membership increased to 50,000 in 1965.<sup>69</sup> By 1969, it had risen to more than 80,000 with 3,000 groups, and membership was more than 90,000 in 1970.<sup>70</sup> All these women's groups operated under

---

<sup>68</sup> Wipper, "Equal Rights for Women" pp.430-433. Wipper quoting the chairperson of MYW organisation, stated that, although women have an important role to play in the development of the nation, yet the role which women have to play in Kenya in the nation building seems rather undermined. In 1965, the Voice of Women magazine quoting the chairperson of MYW stated that, "may I remind you all that all women need recognition, respect, privileges, participation and their voices to be heard in all walks of life." See Voice of Women, Nairobi, June, 1965 and East African Standard Newspaper, June 15th, 1965.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 432.

<sup>70</sup> East African Standard newspaper, March 26, 1970 and March 6, 1973 respectively. All the figures cited were read out to members during the annual general meeting held in March

the umbrella of the MYW organisation, the largest women's organisation in the country up to 1966, when the National Council of Women of Kenya (NCWK) was formed. The 1974-1978 Development Plan in Kenya indicates that, "in 1973 there were 2,805 registered women's groups with an estimated membership of 126,150, mainly in the rural areas."<sup>71</sup>

These figures under-estimated the number of women's groups in Kenya because many women's groups existed, but their activities were not co-ordinated by MYW organisation headquarters, and hence were unrecognised. In Kenya, the official registration of women's groups through the sub-department of the Women's Bureau in the Ministry of Culture and Social Services started in 1976.<sup>72</sup> Before that, all

---

of every year. See also the MYW pamphlet, September, 1974.

<sup>71</sup> Republic of Kenya, 'Development Plan 1974-1978' (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1975), pp.482-483. The 1989 Economic Survey in Kenya reported that, "the number of women groups in the country grew from 21,300 in 1985 to 25,727 in 1988". For details, see ROK, Economic Survey, 1989, Central Bureau of Statistics (C.B.S), Ministry of Planning and National Development, (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1989), p.157.

<sup>72</sup> In 1976, the Government of Kenya created the women's Bureau as a division within the Ministry of Culture and Social Services to "uplift the status of women and increase their involvement in the national development process." The Women's Bureau was empowered to: (a) formulate broad policies that affect women's programs; (b) coordinate women's activities performed by other government line ministries and voluntary organisations; (c) collect and analyze data and information on women and monitor and evaluate women's projects; and (d) plan some women's projects. For details see World Bank, Kenya: Women in Development, pp.xx-xxi, para.36. And Rayah Feldman adds, "this Women's Bureau has now become both the effective focus for policies towards women and a major means of

figures on women's groups were estimates, particularly since MYW did not have a systematic method of establishing the exact number of women's groups in the country.<sup>73</sup> This explains the dramatic increase in women's groups after 1976, when formal registration began. A World Bank country study of Kenya noted that, "in 1976 Kenya had some 4,300 women's groups registered with Government and eligible for assistance, it has over 16,200 spread throughout the country, many affiliated with KANU/Maendeleo ya Wanawake."<sup>74</sup> Between 1976 and 1984, the number of registered women's groups in Kenya quadrupled, and since records of groups are uneven at best, this figure is but an estimate. By 1984 total membership of various women's groups was 636,000. According to the 1979 population census

---

acquiring international funds for aid specifically directed at women. Such funds are welcomed by the government" for more detail, see Feldman, "Women's Groups and Subordination", p.68.

<sup>73</sup> The Women's Bureau also collects data on women's groups in Kenya. As a result, in a survey of 1978 the Bureau stated that "there were then over 8,000 women's groups in the country with a membership of over 300,000 women." For details, see Republic of Kenya, Information on the Women's Bureau, Ministry of Housing and Social Services, Mimeo, May, 1978, revised August, 1979.

<sup>74</sup> World Bank, Kenya: Women in Development, p. xx, para.34. In addition, according to the Women's Bureau, by 1984, there were over 16,232 registered women's groups in Kenya with a total of over 636,000 members. For details, see R.Nasimiyu, "Leadership among women's groups in Kenya: A study of women's groups in Nairobi." Paper presented at the CAAS, conference, University of Alberta, 1987, p.2. Similarly, the 1989 Economic Survey in Kenya pointed out that, "the number of women's groups in the country grew from 21,300 in 1985 to 25,727 in 1988." For more information on women's groups in Kenya, see Republic of Kenya, Economic Survey, 1989, Central Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Planning and National Development, (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1990).

in Kenya, total female population between twenty and seventy-five years was 3,142,253, so membership represented about 20.2 percent of the female population aged between 20-75 years.<sup>75</sup> MYW is therefore a huge organisation, a model for women's organisations in Eastern and Central Africa.

Women's participation in group activities varied from district to district. The 1977 Kakamega District Annual Report lamented the low female participation in group activities. The report observed that MYW organisation had a diminishing impact in organising women in Kakamega district because, " in the district where women form 54.7 per cent of the adult population, women groups membership is simply 1.2 per cent of the approximately 474,538 adult females".<sup>76</sup> By the end of 1977, there were 127 women's groups with membership of 5,769 women (see table 1 for details).

The groups' various activities included animal husbandry, handicrafts, pottery, cottage industry, knitting and sewing, building cattle dips, posho (maize meal) mills, access roads, nursery schools and primary schools. Table 1 provides the distribution of women's groups in administrative divisions in Kakamega district.

---

<sup>75</sup> Kenya Population Census, 1979, Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS). Total female population in Kenya was 7,632,528. In 1969, the female population in Kenya was 5,336,374.

<sup>76</sup> KNA, Kakamega District Annual Report, 1977, p.52.

Table 1

Distribution of women's groups in Kakamega District in 1977.

Division	No. of Groups	Membership
Vihiga	28	1,318
Hamisi	12	665
Butere	17	780
Mumias	29	817
Lurambi	15	573
Kabras	7	475
Ikolomani	15	951
Lugari	4	190
District Total	127	5,769

Source: Kakamega District Annual Report, 1977, p.52.

From Table 1 Vihiga division had by far the largest number of members. This could be attributed to the activities of the former Special Rural Development Programme (SRDP).

On the whole, statistics on women's groups do not provide a true picture of the women's participation in groups because those which were taken into consideration by enumerators were usually only those which were registered through the Women's Bureau. However, the reality of the situation was that many more women's groups existed but were not recognised.

Many of these groups have provided government ministries with the opportunity and capacity to work with women in rural communities. For this reason, in 1985 the government called on District Development Committees (DDC) to ensure that



women's organisations were adequately represented in the DDCs and the lower level development committees.<sup>77</sup> Building on tradition, the government has successfully used these groups as conduits for services in such fields as agriculture, rural water, health and family planning. As the 1989/1993 Development Plan notes:

Women's group participatory initiatives have also contributed tremendously to economic and social progress in the country. Besides their contributions in cash to Harambee projects, they have also made major contribution in terms of materials and labour particularly because they constitute the majority of the rural population. Through various women's organisations in the country including KANU-Maendeleo Ya Wanawake, National Council of Women of Kenya (NCWK),... there has been growing and effective participation of women in developmental activities across the country.<sup>78</sup>

The groups also provided feedback from users to program managers and planners. In this context, the Bureau concentrates on developing innovative approaches through assistance for specific local projects which the line ministries can use and expand upon, and on obtaining feedback from local women which can influence the design of future

---

<sup>77</sup> For a comprehensive analysis see, ROK, District Focus for Rural Development, Government Printer, Nairobi, 1985, pp.3-4. The government also directed DDCs to establish a Family Planning sub-committee made up of the DDC and district heads or other coopted members involved in promoting family planning activities. For details see John M. Cohen and Richard M. Hook, "District Development Planning in Kenya" Unpublished paper, Ministry of Planning and National Development, Nairobi, 1986, p.47.

<sup>78</sup> Republic of Kenya, Development Plan, 1989/1993, Ministry of Finance and Planning, Government Printer, Nairobi, 1988, pp.259-260.

projects. Tables 2 and 3 (next page) provide figures to show the distribution of women's groups in Kenya by province.

#### Case Studies of Women's Groups in Western Province

A total of twenty-one women's groups were surveyed in the course of this study. Four groups were examined in depth. In Kenya, the main concern of women's groups was to generate some income to improve their quality of life and reduce their dependence on male patriarchs. Women's groups also initiated rural community development projects, which aimed to improve the standard of rural women and their families. In addition, women's groups invested money in several income-generating activities. Special ways of generating income among women's groups included, (a) rotating credit associations (popularly

TABLE 2

## Distribution of Women's Groups in Kenya by Province, 1978-1981

Province	1978		1979		1980		1981	
	Groups	Members	Groups	Members	Groups	Members	Groups	Members
Nairobi							170	7,069
Central	2,900	134,100	1,783	97,393	1,809	100,517	3,150	177,143
Coast	330	18,150	147	4,952	151	5,028	555	31,914
Eastern	2,840	105,200	931	38,806	945	41,074	2,200	100,000
N. Eastern	30	900	22	704	22	731	129	1,935
Nyanza	770	24,600	549	18,316	581	20,398	1,201	39,338
R. Valley	855	29,925	432	19,550	433	20,320	1,979	95,053
Western	450	13,500	318	9,932	315	11,324	1,074	40,137
Total	8,225	326,375	4,182	189,653	4,256	119,393	10,458	492,579

Source: Women's Bureau, Ministry of Culture and Social Services  
Annual Reports Form Districts, 1985.

TABLE 3

## Distribution of Women's Groups in Kenya by Province, 1982-1984

Province	1982		1983		1984	
	Groups	Members	Groups	Members	Groups	Members
Nairobi	258	10,652	258	10,652	352	15,047
Central	3,879	160,452	3,966	160,792	4,409	158,914
Coast	697	31,872	744	36,866	802	40,232
Eastern	2,800	100,000	3,053	129,003	3,245	128,629
N. Eastern	159	---	79	1,103	119	3,063
Nyanza	2,085	86,929	2,085	87,269	1,559	35,450
R. Valley	3,157	135,725	3,193	125,510	3,852	199,306
Western	1,600	46,967	1,837	51,282	1,894	54,197
Total	14,635	572,592	15,215	612,477	16,232	636,798

Source: Women's Bureau, Ministry of Culture and Social Services  
Annual Reports form Districts, 1985.

referred to as "merry-go-round"; (b) hiring out labour as a group to rich rural peasants, the proceeds raised in this way were then shared equally among members; (c) handicraft production (basketry, pottery items, knitting sweaters, mats, wall decorations, brooms and a variety of other items), (d) other investment activities, such as agricultural projects and livestock farming which involved the use of rented farms to plant cash crops by the group (a certain percentage of the money earned through the sale of cash crops was then divided among group members and the balance was used to start investments for other enterprises); (e) to raise and receive loans from government departments and non-governmental organisations. However, most women's groups combined various activities in order to generate enough income to solve their problems. Above all, women's groups developed survival strategies which provided members with both economic independence and self-confidence.

Western Province was one of the first areas of Kenya where Africans adopted cash crop production as a major agricultural activity. As a result, most women's groups there have used agricultural projects to generate additional income and as the basis for investments in other enterprises. Kaliyesa women's group in Bungoma district rented plots on which they planted maize, beans, and a variety of vegetables including sunflower. Established in 1969 by five members, Kaliyesa women's group made tremendous achievements. At the

time when this research was in progress, the area Community Development Officer (CDO) described Kaliyesa women's group as "one of the most progressive groups in the district".<sup>79</sup>

In addition, the Ministry of Agriculture has increasingly recognised the importance of women's groups for disseminating agricultural information. Similarly, the Women's Bureau has embarked on various "women in development" programmes in the country. Projects on food preservation techniques have been started in six centres, namely Siaya, Baringo, Murungia, Machakos and Nairobi.<sup>80</sup> Agricultural extension field officers have been encouraged to use local women's groups' agricultural projects as demonstration fields. As one agricultural officer explained:

The use of women's groups is encouraged by the ministry because the turn-up is always very good. We deal with women farmers who are mostly involved with agricultural production on a daily basis. They take the instructions seriously and in most cases, the demonstration plots are part of their on-going income-generating projects.<sup>81</sup>

Therefore, women's groups were not only important for initiating rural development projects but they also acted as centres for the dissemination of knowledge among women and via women to others.

---

<sup>79</sup> Jacob Wafula, Community Development Assistant, (C.D.A), for Ndalul location, Tongaren, 21/2/1988.

<sup>80</sup> ROK, Economic Survey, 1990, CBS, Ministry of Planning and National Development, Government Printer, Nairobi, 1990, p.180.

<sup>81</sup> Agricultural Extension Officer, Tongaren Division, Bungoma District, oral interview, 23/2/1988.

Kaliyesa women's group was formed in 1969. The group was registered in 1971 under the Registrar of Societies Act in Kenya. It is situated in Ndalu sub-location, Tongaren division in Bungoma district. The table 4 shows the number of members enrolled with the four women's groups in Western Province under consideration in this section.

Table 4

Membership in Four women's groups, 1969-1984

Year	Kaliyesa	Lurende	Chango	Babula
1969	5	-	-	-
1970	17	-	-	-
1973	22	-	180	-
1975	44	-	180	-
1978	47	-	214	6
1981	"	10	212	18
1982	"	25	209	22
1984	"	25	209	22

Interviews with the chairpersons and secretaries of the above women's groups in 1987-1988.

Table 4 above indicates a marked increase in membership in the Kaliyesa women's group. By 1970, membership increased after the groups' initial successes. In 1971, membership doubled. In 1975, the group decided to limit membership in order to avoid complex management problems. According to the chairperson, group members are not trained in organisational

management and can only handle small groups using their limited knowledge.<sup>82</sup> Similarly, Chango women's group in Kakamega district had 214 members. The group has five sub-groups or branches. Two of the branches, Itumbu women's group of Ebusiekwe and Ebuyange women's group, are in Bunyore and three are in Maragoli region.

Members of women's groups exhibit marked differences in age and level of education. All the groups studied had members ranging from twenty-eight to sixty-five years. Because the majority of members have limited education (lower primary level), or are illiterate, most of them are home-makers. Some are involved in informal sector market activities and others participate in small scale farming activities and businesses. However, those with upper primary, secondary and advanced levels of education have formal employment, usually as primary school teachers, nurses and officials of charitable organisations. For example, Chango women's group, which has the highest number of members in the province, has 20 members

---

<sup>82</sup> Martha Jumba, chair, Kaliyesa women's group, oral interview, Ndalulungwa, Tongaren, 20/1/1988. Stating the objectives of the Women's Bureau, the 1974/78 Development Plan states, "the programmes for women will include the training of group leaders, functionally oriented, to cover problem solving, communication techniques, use of local resources, programme planning, organisation of group work, evaluation of programme activities and co-ordination of field activities. In particular, family life training units will be established within District Development Centres, childcare, mothercraft, hygiene, house management, first-aid and family planning. An allocation of Kf40,000 is made for this programme for the plan period". For details see, ROK, Development Plan, 1974/1978, p.483. However, like any other government plans, this plan did not take off. The plan was not implemented.



who are primary school teachers, 5 are nurses and 15 members work as administrative officers with government and non-governmental organisations. Other groups, such as Lurende women's group, has 6 members who are teachers and Babula women's group has 2 formally employed members, one is a teacher and the other is employed by a private company in Nairobi. Members of the various women's groups are married, some are widows and a few are divorcees.<sup>83</sup>

There were a few cases of male membership, especially in those groups which engage in business activities like those in Lurende and Babula. Both groups had six and ten male members respectively. Male membership in women's groups is a new phenomena which is beginning to gain popularity in Western Province and other parts of Kenya.

In the initial stages, groups were fairly fragile, often dissolving and regrouping within an area. However, it is evident that after the 1970s, these new groups stabilized and became more multipurpose in nature. They focused mainly on income generating activities and rural community development projects. They were aware of their limitations and constraints, and focused on finding appropriate solutions to their problems. Women increasingly recognised that unity is strength, and collective action was necessary for their survival.

---

<sup>83</sup> Interviews with members of the Executive Committees of the groups, Kakamega, and Bungoma Districts, 1988.

By 1985, Kaliyesa women's group still had 47 members. According to the chairperson, and this reflected the general members' view, the group had no intention of admitting new members because "too large a group would be difficult for us to manage. In addition, the merry-go-round would take a long time to complete a rotation and therefore most members who depend on the contributions from the rotating fund would suffer. We have therefore decided to limit our membership to forty-seven in order to be more effective and efficient".<sup>84</sup>

The level of education for the members of the Kaliyesa women's group varied. Some members were totally illiterate, but the majority have a primary level, hence they can read and write. Other members (three) have acquired some secondary education. Three members are primary school teachers. Most members were home-makers, which they combined with different forms of small-scale informal sector activities and businesses.

Members' ages ranged from thirty-two to fifty-five years.

Rayah Feldman observed that:

Demographic statistics for Kenya indicate that over one-third of women have already married and had their first child by the age of 20. The women's groups, however, attract predominantly older women. Neither the Women's Bureau survey, nor an earlier report on the Women's Group Programme in the Special Rural Development Programme in 1975

---

<sup>84</sup> Martha Jumba, Chairperson, Kaliyesa women's group, interview, Ndalu, 20/1/1988.

referred to the age of women in the women's groups.<sup>85</sup>

In Western Province, however, most members of progressive women's groups were mostly in their thirties, the age range was between twenty to forty-five years. This concurs with Barbara Thomas's findings in Murang'a District in Central Kenya where she discovered that, "Kirogo women's group in Weithaga was comprised primarily of younger married women of whom 95 per cent were literate"<sup>86</sup>

All members of the Kaliyesa women's group were either in polygamous or monogamous marriages. There were three widows, but no divorcees. Most members had large families to support, usually a minimum of four children. They belonged to different religious denominations such as the Anglican church, the Salvation Army, the Catholic church and Pentecostal Assemblies of God denominations. What did this mean in terms of women's group activities and unity? First, it suggests that women's unity is not necessarily based on a common religious background. Nor was their unity built around marriage or kinship relations.<sup>87</sup> Membership in women's groups was based on women's own felt needs in society, which was a product of the gender division of labour and women's

---

<sup>85</sup> Feldman, "Women's Groups and Subordination" p. 79.

<sup>86</sup> Thomas, "Politics, Participation and Poverty" p. 412.

<sup>87</sup> Kaliyesa women's group was formed by women migrants from Kakamega, Busia and a few from Bungoma district.

lack of access to and control over the means of production, land, labour and capital.

The dominant Luhya sub-ethnic groups which comprised the majority of members in the Kaliyesa women's group were the Maragoli and Banyore. There were some Samia as well as a few Bukusu. The group is situated within the administrative boundaries of the settlement schemes, hence most members are immigrants to the area. As new people in an area, some women found it necessary to establish some unity and close contacts amongst themselves. Members hoped to assist each other, share and solve family problems and constraints.<sup>88</sup> With time, five women decided to start a merry-go-round (rotating-credit). They had seen similar rotating credit activities back in their homes, organised and managed by women. This enabled them to get some money to buy household utensils, furniture and also assisted members with financial problems such as funerals, sickness, and school fees, and ceremonies like weddings. Some members used the money they received for home improvements, while others invested in small businesses. Between 1969 and 1971, before its registration, the rotating credit fund was the group's sole income-generating and saving activity.

Once the group was registered, members diversified their activities. They began, 1) to start income-generating activities, 2) to improve members' family welfare materially,

---

<sup>88</sup> Margaret Mulia, oral interview, Ndalua, Tongaren, 2/3/988.

3) to construct a village polytechnic to teach home-craft and other practical education to enable members, their families and even non-members to acquire some skill to enable them to participate in some form of self-employment, 4) to start and diversify agricultural projects for example livestock farming, poultry, bee-keeping and grow cash crops and green vegetables. For example the group grows maize, beans, sunflower and a variety of vegetables. They also intend to own and operate a maize milling-mill.

Chango women's group has also made substantial progress in Western Province. The group was started by four women in 1973. At the beginning, the group organised handicraft lessons for members in sewing, knitting, cookery and child-care. Later, with assistance from the Friends Quaker church, members of Chango women's group received imported second-hand clothes which they distributed to the destitute, the handicapped and orphans in their communities. But members of Chango women's group had additional objectives: they wanted to become economically self-sufficient.

Contributions from members provided the major income sources for the group. They also earned money through the sales of their handicraft articles. In 1977, the Kakamega District Annual Report stated that "Chango women group in Vihiga division has penetrated overseas markets where they sell their banana fibre products".<sup>89</sup> Whenever they sold

---

<sup>89</sup> KNA, Kakamega District Annual Report, 1977, p.52.

their handicraft articles, 10 percent was subtracted from every Kshs.100.00 which the group saved for future investment for other income generating enterprises. They also gained income from their major investments, which included a bread bakery, a tractor and a social hall. The bakery is located at the Vihiga market centre. Chango women's group baked bread, which they sold to the local community. The group also owns a tractor, which ploughs for small scale farmers for a fee. The group hires its own employees to operate the bakery and tractor businesses, thus providing rural employment opportunities. The group's bakery business was faced with cut-throat competition from local businessmen in the baking business, but it has continued to be a source of inspiration for other women in the region.

In 1979, Chango women's group finished the construction of a social hall which is also used as a nursery school in the morning and for adult literacy classes in the afternoon. The group employed a nursery school teacher for the children, but the Ministry of Culture and Social Services paid for the adult literacy programmes. The Ministry rented the social hall from the group. The hall also provide facilities and room for private and public meetings on weekends. For instance, the hall was hired for wedding receptions and other private meetings at a fee. It was also the group's headquarters.

Chango women's group also helped construct a harambee secondary school in the area, which cost them approximately

Kshs.60,000. Chango women's group also purchased, and now own, a farm near Majengo market. They tried to grow carrots there but failed. Potatoes and cassava were stolen by people in the neighbourhood.<sup>90</sup> At the time of this research, the group had decided to grow tea instead.

Individual members of Chango women's group have also made significant achievements. From the money they receive through their rotating credit fund, some women have been able to purchase graded cattle and goats and most members have opened post office savings accounts.<sup>91</sup> Others have invested the money in informal sector activities. Some sell vegetables and a variety of fruits at their local markets, and others participate in a wholesale vegetable business, selling fish and a retail shop business. The chairperson also stated that,

through their group, they have managed to tap government resources in the form of loans and harambee funds. Our group has become an attraction towards the government because we are development conscious. Most important of all, many members have accepted the use of family planning devices. We receive visitors and educators from different parts of the country to talk about the advantages of having a family which one can manage efficiently".<sup>92</sup>

---

<sup>90</sup> Land shortage in Kakamega district is a real acute problem. This thievery is therefore a form of pressure to discourage the group from owing the piece of land and pressuring for its re-sale.

<sup>91</sup> Pheobe Luvyi, Chairperson, Chango women's group, oral interview, Majengo, Kakamega, 6/3/1988.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.,

Through participation in group activities, women have become managers of their own lives.

Other women's groups which made progress in Western Province included Babula and Lurende. Lurende women's group hired plots of land where they grew a variety of cash crops like maize, beans and sugar cane for income generation. In addition, the group usually bought maize from small scale peasant producers, which was resold to the maize and produce board at a profit. Similarly, during periods of food shortages, as in the 1980s, the group applied for a maize permit and were granted permission to buy maize from the Maize and Produce Board. The maize was then sold to the local community at a profit. For instance, in 1983, Lurende women's group bought twenty-three bags of maize at Kshs.4,329, which they sold to the Maize and Produce Board for Kshs. 5,129, making a profit of Kshs.800.00. In 1984, they invested Kshs.30,190 in the maize buying business. They bought maize mostly through the parallel (i.e "black") market, thus they paid less and in addition they did not use the government recommended standard measurement.<sup>93</sup>

---

<sup>93</sup> Women usually have their own local units of measuring maize, beans and maize flour. Engorongoro (gorogoro) which are usually empty tins used for packing cooking vegetable fat, are popularly used by women in the informal market business. They are available in different sizes ranging from 250 grams to two kilograms, (the popular kilo mbili or two kilogram tins). This is the standard unit of measurement used in most makendo transactions. For example, Atieno-Odhiambo and David W.Cohen writes: "the sellers of maize meal have steadily reduced the size of the standard measuring tin from two litres to one litre to half a litre, yet all the time the unit of



Lurende women's group also bought and distributed at least five orange seedlings to members of the group to plant at their homes. These orange trees were already in production at the time of this research. The group also invested money in a retail shop business. The shop was rented in 1984 and the group invested Kshs.8,500. Between May 1984 and May 1985, the shop made a profit of about Kshs. 2,175. The return on this capital was regarded as disappointing. The chairperson explained that, "most of the goods in the shop made very little interest. We are talking of some cents in the form of interest, therefore to save that kind of money is not always very easy. Most of the goods in the shop were sold at the government control price. Furthermore, most of the goods in the shop were still unsold."<sup>9</sup> The shop was rented by the group at Kshs.120.00 per month.

Babula women's group experimented with the cattle business. Members of the group started buying and selling cattle with only Kshs.2,284 which they had raised through the sale of handicraft activities, hiring out their labour and

---

measure is referred to as gorogoro. It is the price of the gorogoro that has tended to remain constant over the last one and a half decades while the measure has shrunk. For details, see David William Cohen and E.S.Atieno-Odhiambo, Siaya: The Historical Anthropology of an African Landscape, (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1989), p.67. This is true in selling but in buying, the gorogoro is enlarged and the price is reduced. The idea is to buy more at a cheaper price to be able to make maximum profit.

<sup>9</sup> Frida Mumelo, chairperson, Lurende women's group, Kanduyi, Bungoma, 7/4/1988.

profit from their maize transactions. In 1981, they started a retail shop business with some Kshs. 1,500. But in 1984, their shop was broken into by thieves who stole most of their goods. In 1982, Babula women group managed to purchase their own shop at their local market centre in Kanduyi market, which is actually an extension of Bungoma township. This cost them a total of Kshs. 7,000. They also bought a bicycle at Kshs. 800 to reduce transportation expenses and problems. In addition, the group rents plots to plant maize, beans and sunflowers for sale. They have been experimenting with bee-keeping projects to diversify their income generating activities. Women's groups have generally diversified as a strategy to increase their profit margins. At the same time such projects provide incentive for members to participate in group functions and activities. However, honesty among women's groups was another pillar which helped to consolidate their income-generating activities. Members knew each other fairly well, and group projects and proposals which affected the financial position of their groups were discussed in general meetings rather than small committees.

From the four cases presented above, we can see that agricultural income-generating projects such as livestock rearing, bee-keeping and cash crop production represent a bold move by women to organise collectively to control the proceeds of their labour. This is a form of resistance to male appropriation of their labour value, which usually occurs

through the control of earnings at the household level. Similarly, the purchase, ownership and management of modern technology like tractors by members of women's groups is a positive move. Chango and Kaliyesa women's groups have purchased tractors, and now control technology which was formerly the preserve of a few rich men in their communities. Women were traditionally excluded from the ownership of modern agricultural technology like tractors and ox-drawn ploughs. Similarly, the purchase and ownership of land and business premises are good examples of radical structural changes. It is in this sense that rural women's groups represent, as Stamp pointed out, "the source of the most radical consciousness to be found in the countryside"<sup>95</sup> Chango women's group clearly demonstrates that women have become owners of the means of production, land. Other groups have rented land for agricultural projects which has enabled them to gain access to the means of production.

Women have also participated in business activities which were originally considered the preserve of men. For instance, selling and buying of livestock by Babula women's group is very significant. The ownership and management of a bread bakery business by Chango women group is equally important. Rural income generating projects initiated by women's groups can also create rural employment opportunities. Chango and

---

<sup>95</sup> Stamp, "Kikuyu Women's Self-Help Groups", p.29.

Kaliyesa women's groups employ labour to operate their tractors and bakery.

However, as Fiona Mackenzie points out, "women are also concerned with maintaining the fabric not only of the family but also the community."<sup>6</sup> Therefore women's groups have also initiated rural development projects which benefit the entire rural communities. Women's groups are clearly the real agents of rural self-reliant development because planned development excluded women and failed to recognise their contributions in nation building efforts.

#### Women's Access to and Control of Cash for the Household.

In Western Province, women's groups combine a variety of functions in their group activities. However, most groups focus on income-generating activities. These activities vary widely depending on the availability of local resources and the co-operation from the community. The objectives of the groups also reflect the needs of the local community and the groups' felt needs. Funds raised by the group through their collective efforts are utilized and/or invested by the individual woman for herself and her household or may be used to provide collective goods for the group or the community.

---

<sup>6</sup> Mackenzie and Taylor, "District Focus For Rural Development in Kenya: The Case of Murang'a District, Central Province" in the Canadian Journal of Development Studies, Vol.VII, No. 2, 1987, pp.308-310.

Women's merry-go-rounds (rotating-funds) are significant in this context.

In many ways, women's rotating credit funds are similar to rotating labour groups (Kimikanda). These groups vary, from twenty-two to 209 members. Women's groups organise and provide economic strategies for women with limited resources and minimal opportunities for investment and saving. Indeed, rotating credit funds offer the key income-generating and saving opportunity for women. Furthermore, women's groups are also structured to protect the interests of all members equally. As a form of economic organisation, rotating associations do not allow any one participant to profit disproportionately."<sup>97</sup> The basic principle of women's rotating credit dictates that each member must have received the collective fund before anyone can receive it a second time. Rotation and regularity are crucial operational concepts in women's rotating credit funds.

The rotating credit fund is the major investment opportunity for women in Kenya's rural areas. In Western Province, many women's groups exist on an ad hoc basis for the purpose of rotating credit funds. This is particularly significant among women who participate in the informal market activities. Rotating credit is also the most common strategy used by women's groups to raise funds for investment in

---

<sup>97</sup> March and Taggau, Women's Informal Associations, pp.65-67.

different enterprises and development projects. There are two types of savings that the women's groups operate. One is the so called emergency fund, for use by members in emergencies such as death or sickness in a family. The other is for future development projects and for investment in income-generating enterprises. Most women's groups in Western Province (and Kenya) have participated in the rotating credit fund activities. This was also true of women's groups in Murang'a and Embu.<sup>98</sup> Rotating credit funds enable members of women's groups to get access to a substantial amount of money which they might not get by themselves.

Kaliyesa women's group have initiated a variety of income-generating activities. I refer to them as income-generating for lack of a better term, because such activities fulfill more functions than the term income-generating suggests. In fact, some rural development activities do not generate any income at all. Others are more income consuming than generating. Indeed, some of the women's group projects are initiated to improve the quality of rural life. For example, springs and wells were protected to get clean water, or nursery schools built to reduce the burden of child-care which could subsequently free women to participate in other activities.

---

<sup>98</sup> Mackenzie and Taylor, "District Focus For Rural Development", p.307, and Nyaga Mwaniki, "Women's Self-Help Groups" pp.218-219.

The Kaliyesa group have participated in a variety of small-scale informal sector businesses. For example, they buy and sell maize, beans and sunflowers to the cereals and produce board.<sup>99</sup> The groups' starting capital for the maize buying business was only Kshs. 2,000. This was mainly money saved from the members' shares. They sell their handicraft items and they have shares in the Kaliyesa Co-operative Society, registered under their name because the idea of forming a co-operative was their brain child. Other income-generating activities include weaving, sewing and knitting. The profits such activities generate are sometimes so small that it takes a long time before members can make a major investment.

#### Loans and Credit Facilities.

In Kenya, women cannot borrow money individually from commercial banks or other financial institutions because they lack collateral for formal credit. Land, which banks recognise as the most adequate form of security for credit, was generally registered in men's names. As a result women have to depend on the informal credit market where they pay high interest rates. Barbara Herz underscored the point that

---

<sup>99</sup> Margaret Mulia, Chairperson, Kaliyesa women's group, oral interview, Ndaluu, Tongaren, 2/3/1988. In 1984, the group was the government agent for buying maize from peasant farmers in the area.

"women's demand for credit for productive purposes is strong in Kenya, judging from the high interest rates they pay in the informal credit market."<sup>100</sup> The official interest rates on loans range from 12.5 percent to 16 percent. Informal credit was loaned at twenty percent. Thus, individual group members can receive access to credit through women's group activities. Lack of access to formal credit facilities has retarded rural women's progress in rural development activities.

Women need capital to invest in rural productive enterprises. In Kenya, the government has been considering and experimenting with measures to expand credit through women's groups, with less reliance on land as collateral and more on peer measures and ability to pay. Funding of women's groups has been the major pre-occupation of the Women's Bureau.<sup>101</sup> Some women's groups have received government grants, loans and financial assistance.

In 1976, Kaliyesa women's group acquired a loan of Kshs.17,000 from Bungoma district Union, which they repaid

---

<sup>100</sup> Barbara Herz, "Women in Development: Kenya's Experience" p. 44. And she adds, "Credit from banks and other major credit institutions is in principle available to men and women alike, yet most women rely on much more expensive credit from money lenders. An important reason is that land title is still generally required as collateral for formal credit. Land is generally registered in men's names. Husbands are reluctant to borrow for their wives' crops. The other reason is that women with little education, the practical requirements of loan application and account management can be daunting.

<sup>101</sup> ROK, Economic Survey, 1990, CBS, Ministry of Planning and National Development, Government Printer, Nairobi, 1989, p.180.



with interest in 1979. Bungoma District Development Committee (D.D.C.) extended material support to the group in 1983. The DDC gave Kaliyesa women's group the following: 22 graded cows, 22 wheel barrows, 220 iron sheets, 220 building posts, 44 bags of fertilizer and 75 kgs. of nails. This material aid was distributed by the groups' office bearers among members. The iron sheets, building posts and nails were used to construct cow-sheds at the homes of individual members who were given cows.<sup>102</sup> However, every time a member of the group sold milk to the co-operative creameries, the group received 40 percent of the sale price.

The group used part of the forty-four bags of fertilizer on their agricultural projects. The remainder was distributed to members for use on their individual plots. This was not free. Members who were given the groups' fertilizer paid for it after they sold their produce. But the wheelbarrows were donated by the group to deserving members and became their personal property. Similarly, 144 chicks were distributed among group members. However, every time a group member with group assets, like hens or cows, sells milk or eggs, 40 percent of the sale price goes to the group.

In 1980, the Agricultural Finance Co-operation (AFC) gave the Kaliyesa group a loan of Kshs. 57,000. The group added

---

<sup>102</sup> The twenty-two cows which were given to the group were given to an equal number of group members i.e twenty-two members, that is one cow per member the chairperson of the group reported. Martha Jumba, chairperson, Kaliyesa women's group, oral interview, 1988.

another Kshs. 56,000 from their group savings and purchased a tractor. Thus, Kaliyesa became the first women's group in Western Province to purchase such a farm implement which most people could not afford. The repayment of the AFC loan was completed in July, 1984. Indeed, the AFC official in Bungoma district told me that, "Kaliyesa women's group has a very good loan repayment record. It is the best women's group in Bungoma district."<sup>103</sup> A similar positive observation about women's good loan repayment performance was underlined by the World Bank. The Country study noted that:

While women have access to some informal credit, the flow of formal credit to women is evidently minimal, primarily because women lack title to the land or other assets required for collateral. But women's demand for credit for productive purposes is strong, judging from the higher interest rates they pay in the informal credit market and from their own statements. International evidence suggests that women... even poor women ... can be good credit risks. Collateral requirements that effectively rule out many potentially productive borrowers ought to be reconsidered on grounds of economic efficiency.<sup>104</sup>

Other organisations which extended financial assistance to the Kaliyesa women's group include the Kenya National Farmers Union (K.N.F.U). For instance, in 1983, the KNFU, gave the group Kshs. 4,000.

---

<sup>103</sup> AFC official, Bungoma District, Oral Interview, 10/3/1988.

<sup>104</sup> World Bank, Kenya: Women in Development, pp. xv-xvi. In addition, the study noted that, the government believes that expansion of credit for women's groups is worth exploring. A few small scale programs, are underway in Kenya to provide credit with less reliance on land as collateral and more on peer pressure and ability to pay.

The group has also received some financial and material aid from government departments and non-governmental organisations. Table 3 below provides statistics on government financial allocations to women's groups and programmes in Kenya.

Table 5

Government Financial Allocations to Women's Programmes, 1975-1985. (Kenya Shillings '000)

Financial Year	Total Allocation (Ministry of Culture and Social Services)	Women's Programmes Allocation	Percent to Women's Programmes
1975/1976	1,558.3	8.4	0.5
1980/1981	10,738.2	391.9	3.6
1984/1985	11,043.0	1,285.8	11.6

Source: ROK, Central Bureau of Statistics, Government Estimates; Required Expenditures, p.138.<sup>105</sup>

<sup>105</sup> Statistics on grants extended to women's groups before 1985 were not readily available, however, the table below indicates the trend of financial assistance to various women's groups in Kenya.

Table 6

Government Grants to women's groups by Province, 1986-1989.

Province	Number of Grps Assisted				Amount Granted Ksh. '000.			
	1986	1987	1988	1989	1986	1987	1988	1989
Nairobi	22	22	10	10	150	90	61	61
Coast	55	61	60	60	472	382	226	238
Eastern	60	74	60	60	432	372	201	213
N/Eastern	34	25	30	30	196	156	93	99
Central	50	42	50	50	380	288	200	210
Rift V.	135	131	130	130	1076	796	468	494
Nyanza	49	41	40	40	328	268	154	162
Western	33	32	30	30	276	206	118	124
<b>Total</b>	<b>438</b>	<b>428</b>	<b>410</b>	<b>410</b>	<b>3310</b>	<b>2558</b>	<b>1521</b>	<b>601</b>

In 1975 the Ministry of Social Services and Housing extended material farm input aid to Kaliyesa women's group which added upto Kshs. 10,000. Additionally, in 1976, Kaliyesa received 18 bee-hives and 144 chicks from the same Ministry. In 1978 and 1981, the Ministry of Culture and Social Services gave Kaliyesa women Kshs. 25,000 (\$1923.08) and Kshs. 20,000 (\$1,538.46) respectively. This fits in with a statement made by the head of the Women's Bureau, namely that, "financial assistance in the order of K.shs 5,000 - 10,000 has gone to 500 or 600 women's groups. This according to the Women's Bureau estimate accounts for only 6 to 7 per cent of all groups."<sup>106</sup> This support demonstrates clearly that efforts to assist women are more effective and affordable than continual neglect.

Other sources of income for the Kaliyesa women's group come from the members' subscriptions, which is Kshs.150.00 annually per member. At the same time, during every merry-go-round visit to a member's house, 10 per cent of the money

---

Sources: Economic Survey, 1990, Central Bureau of Statistics, (CBS) Ministry of Planning and National Development, Government Printer, Nairobi, 1990, p.181, and Economic Survey, 1989, CBS, Government Printer, Nairobi, 198, p.157.

Table 6 above shows the number of women's groups by province which have obtained financial assistance from the government. The table also shows that some provinces have received more grants than others. It also indicates that the amount of funds granted declined rapidly between 1987 and 1988, but recovered by 1989. The table shows that by 1986, only 30 women's groups received government financial assistance in Western Province.

<sup>106</sup> Feldman, "Women's Groups and Subordination" p. 77.

contributed by individual members is invested in their common group fund (treasury). Additional income is raised from the group farming activities, such as selling their vegetables, sunflower, maize, and beans. Between 1971-1980, the group used to rent 15 to 20 acres of land for various agricultural functions. The cost for renting an acre of land varied between Kshs.200 and 300 during these years.<sup>107</sup> After 1980, because of loan repayment commitments, the acreage dropped to five acres, but individual members have donated about three acres to the group for the growing of vegetables. In addition, the group obtained income from their tractor earnings, from the sale of their cows' milk, eggs from their hens and handicraft articles. The group also gives out soft loans to the members, at a charge of 10 per cent interest. The interest was worked out very simply in order to be understood by even the least educated members. Members pay Kshs.10.00 on every Kshs. 100.00 borrowed from the group treasury. Non-members pay Kshs. 20.00 on every Kshs. 100.00 borrowed from the group. This works out as 20 per cent interest rate, which is the highest known interest rate paid on loans in the country, although private moneylenders would take much higher interest. This was traditionally unavailable to women especially from recognised financial institutions.

---

<sup>107</sup> Margaret Mulia, secretary, Kaliyesa women's group, Ndalu, Tongaren, 2/3/1988.

Thus, individual group members get access to cash through women's group activities.

What does this mean in terms of women's access to financial and credit facilities in the country? Clearly there has been regional differentiation among women's groups in terms of access to government funds and credit resources. Some have benefitted more than others as the case of Kaliyesa women's group illustrates. In fact, the financial credit and loans extended to Kaliyesa women's group provide a vivid example of the unequal distribution of funds among women's groups which Feldman observed.<sup>108</sup> "Progressive" women's groups received more financial support than the less "progressive" groups, although in reality, the less "progressive" groups need more financial support than the more "progressive" groups.<sup>109</sup> However, this form of allocation encourages successful group activity. Women's groups are often the strongest local groups and once registered with the Ministry of Culture and Social Services through the sub-department of the Women's Bureau, they are then entitled to raise funds for local projects and are eligible to receive government assistance. However, not all registered groups have received government funds or any other form of material support. Women's participation in rural development is

---

<sup>108</sup> Feldman, "Women's Groups and Subordination", p. 77.

<sup>109</sup> Progressive women's groups are those groups whose investment projects and objectives have been implemented successfully.

without doubt both crucial and fundamental because their involvement enhances the chance for the success of rural development projects. Therefore, women's struggle to reduce their poverty levels and to initiate rural community development projects requires sustainable efforts and continual official support from finance and line ministries, as well as institutions specifically dealing with women.

Thus, through participation in group activities, women have managed to establish some access to loans and other credit facilities previously unavailable individually. In fact, while loans and credit is only extended to women as a group, in the final analysis, individual members of the group benefit from the profits generated by such loans and credit facilities. This goes a long way to alleviate the poverty of rural women in Western Province and in Kenya. It also reduces or even eliminates women's financial and economic dependence on men.

Chango women's group situated in Chango village (Majengo) Vihiga division in Kakamega district is another very successful group. In 1979, Dr. Julia Ojiambo, then Assistant Minister for Social Services and Housing, raised Kshs. 14,000 for the group at the official opening of their social hall. In 1981, the group received Kshs. 10,000 from the Ministry of Culture and Social Services. The group had received many other numerous small donations from different individuals and

organisations.<sup>110</sup> This group has made significant achievements in the area, and is the only group in the region with several branches.

However, not all women's groups qualify to receive loans, credit and aid like Kaliyesa and Chango women's groups. Thus, the projects initiated by individual women's groups are crucial because credit or loans extended to women through their groups is issued on the basis of the viability of the group projects. Government officials at the local level evaluate group activities as the basis for the allocation of loans and credit facilities. Viable projects attract more external and internal assistance. Financial institutions are willing to extend loans and credit to such groups once they establish the viability of the projects and the group's ability to repay the loan. In this case the group's assets and projects act as security for the loan and credit facilities received by the group. Kaliyesa and Chango women's groups have a variety of assets, which gave them access to loans and credit. These groups have made progress unmatched by other groups in the region, but credit facilities extended to these groups seem to suggest that conditions for women's access to loans and credit facilities are beginning to improve somewhat.

---

<sup>110</sup> Phoebe Luvayi, Chairperson, Chango Women's Group, Majengo, Kakamega, 6/3/1988.



For women the process of investment and capital accumulation has not been a simple one. However, some women through groups have increasingly demonstrated their ability to save and make significant investments from marginal resources. Kaliyesa women's group assets include a tractor, which they bought in 1980 at Kshs. 114,000, 22 cow-sheds, 27 head of cattle, 50 hens, 18 bee-hives, and 10 big-size milk cans. They have shares in the Kaliyesa Development Co-operative Society, which was established in 1980. They have also built a water tank by their horticultural farm for irrigational purposes during the dry season.<sup>111</sup> No members could acquire such assets on their own, but as group members they can. Therefore women's groups provide a survival strategy for women with marginal resources to invest and accumulate capital.

#### Constraints on Development

Women's groups also experience problems and constraints in their pursuit of group and national development goals. Women's groups in Kenya face stiff competition from well established businessmen and women in their local communities

---

<sup>111</sup> In 1987, the Swedish International Development Agent (SIDA), donated a water pump and water pipes to the group. Additional funds from SIDA was used by the group to construct a big water storage tank which the group completed in 1989. In fact, the group can now supply water to a radius of about 20 kms. in the area. This is an additional source of income-generation. The local community in the area was extremely excited about it. Interview with the chairperson of the group, Martha Jumba, 1988.

and market centres. Competition posed by other tractor owners in the settlement schemes was particularly disturbing. Such competition, combined with price increases, especially for diesel and other tractor spare parts, means that the group makes a very marginal profit from their tractor business after they take out the cost of salaries and maintenance.

Competition also comes from other women's groups in the area who invest in similar handicraft activities and horticultural products. In fact, all women's groups in Kenya compete for the same limited market as far as the sale of their handicraft items are concerned. Up to 1985, women's groups faced a problem of inadequate markets for their handicraft articles. This was aggravated by duplication of handicraft articles among women's groups. Too much imitation and quality was being sacrificed for quantity. Indeed, the Women's Bureau should as a matter of urgency try to regulate the production of handicraft items among women's groups in Kenya with a view to improving quality and variety.

Furthermore, Barbara Herz observed that, " some women's groups have had difficulty with income-generation projects such as producing craft work for sale, because the activities promoted by the projects lost the competition for time with women's other responsibilities, including farming."<sup>112</sup>

---

<sup>112</sup> Barbara Herz, "Women in Development: Kenya's Experience", pp.44-45.

Handicraft products are clearly insufficient as projects for income generation.

Poor infrastructure has also undermined efforts to transport commodities, especially bulky agricultural products, to market centres. Perishable horticultural products, like tomatoes, onions, green vegetables and afternoon milk (which is not usually taken to the Kenya co-operative creameries (K.C.C.)) are particularly vulnerable. In the absence of adequate infrastructure, women try to obtain proper storage facilities for such perishable products, but they are expensive. Poor infrastructure and lack of market for women's finished products has without doubt retarded the progress of women's group activities, and thus delayed women's advancement in rural areas.

Some of the problems experienced by women's groups are caused by jealousy from the less "progressive" members of the local community. Martha Jumba, the chairperson of Kaliyesa women's group reported that, "the community around them envy them particularly because of the assets they have accumulated over the years and also the achievements made by their group."<sup>113</sup> For example, the secretary, Margaret Mulia explained that on several occasions, their tractor had been ambushed by both the police and local community. It seems some male members of the community doubt women's managerial

---

<sup>113</sup> Martha Jumba, chairperson, Kaliyesa women's group, oral interview, Ndalua, 20/1/1988.

ability and responsibility over assets like the tractor. As a result, some men whose wives are group members quarrel with them over group membership. In fact, some members' husbands condemn group membership and participation in group activities as a cover up for undesirable behaviour and 'fitina' (gossip).<sup>114</sup> In reality, the problem was not that men opposed their wives' participation in group activities, but in fact, these men wanted to manage the group's assets. This is the real problem because conservative ideas that males should manage have been challenged by the women's groups. The focus of women's group activities has always been on income-generation with a view to increasing their economic independence, especially in matters relating to family expenditure. This attitude has kept most women from giving in to their husbands' demands. Obviously, women's ability to organise independently from men is a major challenge to men, patriarchy and the state.<sup>115</sup>

Women's determination to succeed in groups has created the energy and solutions to wrestle with the dilemma that

---

<sup>114</sup> Margaret Mulia, secretary of Kaliyesa women's group, oral interview, 2/3/1988.

<sup>115</sup> In Kenya, the State's decision to affiliate MYW organisation to the ruling party KANU is part of the response to the challenge that women's groups posed to the state. As the 1989 Economic Survey notes, "in recognition of the important role played by women in the economy, Maendeleo Ya Wanawake organisation was affiliated to KANU. For details, see ROK, Economic Survey, CBS, Ministry of Planning and National Development, (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1988), p.157.

group activities often compete with their family responsibilities. Indeed, women's participation in group activities is achieved in addition to their normal domestic household responsibilities of production and reproduction. But, as one female informant remarked, " we cannot stop to be ourselves because of group activities. At the same time, it is necessary for us women to come together, share ideas and support ourselves because women's family responsibilities are increasing as traditional life-styles give way to modern values. Who would like to remain in the smoke-filled kitchen for the rest of her life?"<sup>16</sup>

Some rural men have recognised women's groups as a supplementary tool for regional development. They support the argument that women must be assisted in this effort because development is for all. Others are not so supportive. One male informant argued that the unemployed women, while away performing group functions, fail to fulfill their family responsibilities. Women in formal employment hired housemaids and farm-servants to provide labour needed for productive and domestic chores. Some male informants made similar comments about women in formal employment and added that these women do not provide manual labour, but only send

---

<sup>16</sup> Loyce Nekesa, Musese women's group, Bungoma, 4/3/1988.

other members under the pretext of performing government duties.<sup>117</sup>

However, in Kenya, self-help projects have been particularly evident in the post-independence period. Women's self-help projects were unique, independent and self-reliant. Unlike the self-help projects in rural areas which were sanctioned and approved by the District Development Committees (DDC), women's self-reliant development projects were neither sanctioned nor approved by the DDC. Additionally, women's self-reliant development projects were initiated by women's groups on the basis of the members' felt needs. The members' needs were in most cases a reflection of the basic needs of the local community. The DDC's commitment towards women's development projects was minimal because of the fear of financial responsibilities. Robert Chambers appropriately argued that "self-help presents major opportunities for development. It can increase the competence and confidence of a group and its members in handling their affairs."<sup>118</sup>

---

<sup>117</sup> Government duties in this context refer to formal employment such as teaching, Community Development Officers (CDO) and others. Manual labour on the other hand refers to the group's income-generating activities such as weeding their maize or beans plants which would require all members to participate but members who have formal employment such as teachers and nurses or CDOs are always exempted on condition that they pay a certain amount of money in instead of actual labour.

<sup>118</sup> Robert Chambers, Managing Rural Development: Ideas and Experience from East Africa, (Connecticut: Kumarian Press, 1986), p.101. In addition, the examples of the so-called mabati groups in Kenya indicates how one success can lead onto another. See also Philip M.Mbathi, "Harambee Self-Help:The

Women's groups' participatory initiatives have contributed tremendously to economic and social progress, and have been at the centre of development and nation building efforts.

For women in both Western Province and Kenya, self-reliant development refers to two fundamental aspects. First, it refers to women's dependence on the internal generation of funds within groups and second, to their autonomy and ability to initiate development projects which pay special attention to women's basic needs. Self-reliant development is also a form of struggle by women to establish appropriate survival strategies which would reduce their social, economic and political constraints.<sup>119</sup> In this context, women's groups have provided an opportunity for women to pool their limited resources in search of appropriate survival strategies. As Stamp correctly points out, " by channelling cash from crops into self-help organisations, they were preventing the appropriation of their product by their husbands, and secondly, that they were attempting to accumulate capital as a means of protecting and enhancing their fragile incomes and

---

Kenya Approach" in The African Review, Vol.2, no.1, June, 1972.

<sup>119</sup> Quoting the Women's Bureau and Central Bureau of Statistics' survey data of 1977, Fiona Mackenzie and D. R.F.Taylor stated that 62% of the groups gained funds from membership fees, 88.7% from individual contributions, 64.3% from providing group labour on non-members' farms and 47.7% from community harambee fund raising activities. For details see Mackenzie and Taylor, "District Focus as a Strategy for Rural Development in Kenya," p.309.

compensating for lost domestic production."<sup>120</sup> Women's basic resource is their labour. Through groups, women have established some limited control over the products of that labour.

### Conclusion

In Kenya, formal women's groups were based on the traditional informal networks which existed in their societies as a result of the gender division of labour. Women's traditional work parties were essential because they helped women fulfill their productive and reproductive obligations. In Western Province, as elsewhere in Kenya, women's groups have had specific stated objectives. The common objective has been the need to establish some economic independence in order to reduce dependence on male patriarchal heads of households. Indeed, women's groups have provided a variety of survival strategies for rural women, including opportunities for investments in income-generating activities and active participation in rural development projects. The organisational styles of these groups are interesting because they structure leadership, responsibility and participation to redistribute insufficient resources and meet emergency needs

---

<sup>120</sup> Stamp, "Kikuyu Women's Self-Help Groups", p.40. Rural development projects initiated by women like building of nursery schools and water piping are supposed to reduce the burden of women's labour.



of members. Similarly, rotating credit funds presented opportunities for rural women to accumulate capital, which could be reinvested in other income-generating enterprises such as informal sector activities or retail shop businesses.

Planned development often marginalised women's efforts and abilities. In Kenya, rural women are central rather than marginal to the process of development. Indeed, as the 1974/1978 Development Plan in Kenya stated, "the women of Kenya have formed a number of groups which constitute a potentially effective medium for dissemination of knowledge for improving the quality of life in rural areas. Hitherto, they have been inadequately exploited as a means of inducing change in the rural areas."<sup>121</sup> In fact, as women's responsibilities continued to increase, so did the complexity of the activities that they undertook collectively.

Women's groups are increasingly being recognised as a significant force in rural development. The marginalization of women in economic development activities was part and parcel of the colonial policy of capitalist development. As the 1989/1993 Development Plan in Kenya appropriately states:

women have always occupied a central role in African economies being the main agricultural producers and suppliers of welfare services at the household and community level. The woman's position in traditional society was clearly defined and largely determined her rightful social status. However, colonial subjugation and its attendant Victorian attitudes towards women both as workers

---

<sup>121</sup> Republic of Kenya, Development Plan 1974-1978, (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1975), pp.482-483.

and partners in life eroded women's economic and social status.<sup>122</sup>

The objective of women's groups in Kenya has been to alleviate women's poverty through improved access to productive assets like land, cattle, labour and credit facilities. However, the most important objective of women's participation in group activities was the internal generation of income to meet the goals for the maintenance of individual households, initiate development projects and for the accumulation of capital. Women's groups were therefore ideal for women with marginal resources and limited opportunities for investment. Consequently, women's participation in development oriented activities was also a direct consequence of women's long overdue desire to initiate changes which would meaningfully address their own economic constraints, at whatever level.

Women's participation in rural development activities has been achieved largely through their groups. Through them women have the autonomy to initiate rural self-reliant development projects. These projects are self-reliant because they are based on the internally generated funds. The projects are initiated on the basis of women's basic needs, which in most cases reflect the needs of the rural local community. In addition, women have established some limited control over their labour and its products. Additionally,

---

<sup>122</sup> Republic of Kenya, Development Plan, 1989/1993, (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1988), pp.27-28.

groups have given women limited access to loans and other forms of financial credit and aid which were previously unavailable to them individually. Indeed, women in groups control technology which has been traditionally preserved for men. Women have become partial and real owners of the means of production, land. The development and expansion of women's groups in Kenya was based on gender solidarity, while class differentiation among women seemed to provide an elite leadership which genuinely strove to improve the lot of the mass of poorer women as case studies in this chapter seem to suggest. Whatever the problems facing women's groups in Kenya, overall there can be no doubt that they are essential for the empowerment of women, particularly in the rural areas.

## CONCLUSION

This study has argued that the co-existence of patriarchy and the expansion of capitalism through settler farmers and Indian merchants facilitated the exploitation of female and child labour in Kenya. This was achieved with the cooperation of the colonial bureaucracy in Kenya, which although it responded to pressures from London to issue a series of labour ordinances and circulars ostensible to protect women and children from exploitation of their labour, in fact did little to enforce these, on the plea that this was extremely difficult to accomplish in the face of "African tradition". Numerous studies of labour history in Kenya have emphasised the way in which colonial labour policy worked as a strategy to enhance capital accumulation by settler farmers in Kenya. These have generally concentrated on the phenomenon of male migrant labour, saying little about women's labour and even less about child labour.

This study has suggested that African labour history must be analysed as a totality. Studies should examine labour in both subsistence and cash crop production, and its consequences for property relations, modes of appropriation, control over female and child labour, and control over access to productive resources such as land and cattle. This would enable labour historians to establish a clear picture of the

various survival strategies which members of local communities developed to fulfill their basic needs.

The Abaluhya in precolonial times were a patrilineal and patriarchal people. While bridewealth strengthened the social system it nevertheless categorised women as property. So long as land remained plentiful this could make for an honored role for women as producers of plentiful food and providers of children. The coming of colonial rule and capitalism in Kenya had the effect of increasing gender inequality as social inequalities in the precolonial system increasingly became translated into significant economic inequalities between the sexes. The introduction of settler farming and capitalism in Kenya did not lead to the destruction of subsistence production in Western Province. Existing women's and children's labour continued to sustain and even expand rural subsistence production in the face of competing labour demands. This intensified labour was not alleviated by improved or appropriate technology. Furthermore, women took up previously male tasks as male migration denuded the rural areas of male labour, and altered the traditional gender division of labour.

Time-budget and gender allocation of tasks in rural production processes demonstrate that adult females and children contributed more labour than males both for agricultural production and household domestic chores. Male children's contribution in rural agricultural subsistence and

household domestic activities declined as they matured. But women's participation in rural subsistence production did not lead to their improved status in society. Subsistence production reproduced male workers and thus enhanced the process of capital accumulation for settlers, Indians and even some African males. Women's presence in the rural areas provided a home for male workers when they were no longer needed in the European controlled economy. The study observed that the system of male migration and the introduction of cash crops led to the intensification of female and child labour in rural agricultural production. It also led to changes in the gender division of tasks with women taking up what were previously male tasks.

The introduction of peasant cash crop production further altered the gender division of labour and tightened male control over female and child labour. The withdrawal of male labour from the rural areas, combined with the new demands of cash crop production alongside subsistence production, led to the intensification of female and child labour. Technology did little to assist this labour. Indeed technology conserved male labour as it increased women's. At the same time the intensification of women's labour in cash crop production did not lead to their control over cash crops, which belonged to men. Moreover, expansion of peasant cash crop production was achieved at the expense of food crop farms. As a result, cash

production significantly reduced women's control over subsistence production.

The development of cash crop production and the restructuring of labour organisation favoured men. The alliance between European and African patriarchy was further strengthened by changes in the land tenure system which disregarded women's use rights in land. Women became providers of labour, but lost control over the land they worked and the goods produced on that land. In Western Province, patriarchal and patrilineal systems which characterized the Abaluhya communities discriminated against women. Changes in the land tenure system conserved the patriarchal control over productive resources and thus by extension strengthened male control over women and children's labour. The process of individualization of land, and the creation of land title deeds and all the benefits which accompanied it, such as the extension of credit facilities, have worked to the disadvantage of women. This led to a process of female dependence on men for all their needs.

Labour legislation by the colonial government of Kenya might have done something to mitigate the conditions of women's and children's labour, particularly given the pressures exerted by missionaries and Colonial Office needs to conform to international obligations. While colonial labour legislation insisted on the right of government to call out forced labour on public works, the legislation also made it

clear that women and children were exempt from such duties. Nevertheless males persistently substituted women relatives and children in this kind of heavy work, freeing themselves to pursue wage labour on settler plantations or in towns. When confronted by missionaries with documented examples of these legal violations, Kenya government officials tended to plead their powerlessness in the face of "African tradition", which in reality meant the influence of African male patriarchs.

While missionaries agitated against forced labour, they were almost as fervently opposed to women seeking paid employment, particularly when it was far from home. This was consistent with the missionaries' own brand of patriarchy, the vision of the Christian nuclear family headed by the husband who would be obeyed by the wife and children. Hence missionaries remained unconcerned with the extent of male control over female and child labour in the domestic economy of food production. For the colonial government there was even less prospect of any "interference" in the African household economy and its divisions of labour.

However, women have devised several survival strategies to help them achieve some autonomy so they can function independently from male patriarchs. These strategies have also enabled women to control their labour and part of its products. Women's participation in rural non-farm activities is a form of survival strategy which has improved their status in society and also enabled them to acquire some independent



cash income. These activities were a response to women's lack of access to rural productive resources, and their inability to obtain alternative forms of employment in the modern sector. The latter was a result of women's limited access to modern western education which was a prerequisite for modern sector employment. It has been argued that patriarchal norms also determined who received education and who did not. Male children were more apt to receive modern education, while female children, because of their usefulness at home, stayed home or received an inferior education. As a result, women turned to rural non-farm sector activities, where they could use skills acquired in the traditional informal system of education such as pot-making, weaving and basketry to survive.

Indeed, skillful women were able to make good profits at these activities. Similarly, it has been suggested that women's participation in rural non-farm sector activities was achieved with the help of their children's labour. Trade in goods from household-based production was a good form of income generation for women, and the expansion of open-air markets, combined with the partial development of the infrastructure contributed to their success in rural non-farm sector activities. However, women traders faced many problems and constraints. Most women had no access to credit facilities, so could not expand their businesses. Competition in rural non-farm sector activities was intense and therefore profit was very low. As a result, women had to participate in

a variety of activities and work very hard to fulfill their basic needs.

Women in Kenya have increasingly come to recognise the fact that in a male dominated society, female solidarity is important for their struggle to achieve some autonomy and control over their labour and its products. Many women have come to realise the importance of self-reliant development, which is best achieved through the activities of women's groups. Women's groups in Kenya have aimed to improve women's access to productive resources, land, labour and capital. Female participation in women's groups has been an important household strategy for coping with the need for increased productivity in the face of declining resources available to women. Through participation in groups, women have obtained access to credit facilities, which were previously preserved for men only. Similarly, through groups, women have been able to acquire the autonomy needed to initiate rural self-reliant development projects.

In addition, groups have organised mutual aid activities such as merry-go rounds which have enabled women to get large sums of money at once. Participation in group activities has been a form of saving for women. Women groups have given women limited access to loans and other forms of financial credit previously unavailable to them individually. These loans have enabled groups to gain access to technology which has improved their position in rural economies. Women's

groups have been essential for the empowerment of women, particularly in the rural areas. At the same time, they must tread carefully, as they are in many ways a threat to patriarchal authority and the Kenyan state.

Real increase of women and children's labour began in the 1920s, particularly with the establishment of the ex-soldier settler plantations which coincided with the start of peasant cash crop production and it continued to intensify as diversification of peasant cash crops proceeded from 1950s through to the post-independent period. However, women started to devise strategies to cope with this intensification of labour demands through participation in group activities and have sustained and expanded women's groups up to the post-independent period. In fact, a close examination of changes in the gender division of labour and women's access to resources seem to suggest that the division of labour is now in a stage of transition and perhaps, in future cash crop production may not depend on family labour as has been the case in the past. It is probable that cash crop production will come to depend entirely on hired labour or on contractual labour within the family. This is already happening in some parts of Kenya. Similarly, women's demands for their share of cash crops and control over it will also increase. The struggle is already on in some parts of Kenya such as Central Province. In Murang'a District, women refused to harvest coffee until their names were included on the co-operative

society's pay rolls. This was a move in the right direction and future research may well come to focus on these changes in the gender division of labour and allocation of resources.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Primary Sources.

#### 1. Public Records Office.

- Colonial Office (CO) 533/88/15, The Native Women Workers Protection Rules, 1923.
- CO/533/413/17, Circular No. 4 From The Native Affairs Department to all Administrative Officers, 1927.
- CO/533/408/10, Communication Between Governor, Kenya Colony and the Secretary of State on Labour in Kenya.
- CO/533/409/17, Report of the Committee on Native Land Tenure in the North Kavirondo Reserve, October, 1930.
- CO/533/250, Memorandum on Recruiting for Private Enterprises in Kenya Colony.
- CO/533/396/5, Memorandum on Alleged Injustices to Natives in Kenya by Drummond Shiels.
- CO/533/510/16, Child Labour in Kenya.
- CO/533/748, Female Labour in Kenya.
- CO/822/192, Report on Agrarian Policy for Dealing with Population Increase, Land Tenure and Fragmentation in Kenya by R.M.J. Swynnerton, Assistant Director of Agriculture, 17 November, 1951.
- CO/822/1139, Extract from the Federation of Social Services, Annual Report, 1954.
- CO/822/1717, Communication Between the Secretary of State for the Colonies and the Chief Native Commissioner, Kenya Colony.
- CO/859/457, Report of the Committee on Young Persons and Children, 1952 (Slade Report).
- CO/589/578, Social Development in Colonial territories Revised October, 1953, Memo No. 10.

#### 2. Kenya National Archives (KNA).

- KNA, Agr/KSM/1/801 Annual Reports, North Kavirondo, 1934-35.
- KNA, Agr/KSM/1/10, Special Crops Reports

- KNA, Agr/1/1244, Agriculture in "Native" Areas.
- KNA, Agr/KSM/1/829 Crop Reports, ARNK, 1934-47.
- KNA, Agr/KSM/1/842 Agriculture in Native Areas.
- KNA, Department of Agriculture Annual Reports, 1959-1968.
- KNA, Department of Agriculture, Agricultural census, 1931-1933.
- KNA, PC/NZA/3/2/29, Maize Production.
- KNA, PC/NZA/3/2/30 Agriculture Crop Production: Specific Crop: Maize.
- KNA, The Native Affairs Department, Annual Reports, 1929-1960.
- KNA, W.E. Owen Papers Box 1-9.
- KNA, DC/KSM/1/17/27, Communication Between District Commissioner, Karicho and Provincial Commissioner, Nyanza.
- KNA, Kakamega District Annual Reports, 1960-1985.
- KNA, Agr/KSM/1/829, Despatch from the Governor of Kenya to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 2 June, 1950.
- KNA, Agr/KMS/1/509, Development and Policy: North Nyanza, 1945-51.
- KNA, E.A.P. Gazette, The Crown Lands Ordinance, 1902, Sections Nos. 4-6.
- KNA, E.A.P. Gazette, Vol. 1, No. 85
- KNA, DC/NN/10/1, Political Associations, 1926-40.
- KNA. DC/KMS/1/17/63, Labour: Shortage of Labour.
- KNA, Lab/3/111, Letter from Provincial Commissioner, Nyanza to the Honourable Chief Secretary, October 26, 1942.
- KNA, Department of Agriculture, Annual Report 1950, Government Printer, 1951.
- KNA, Agr/KMS/1/1016, Letter from Agricultural Officer, North Kavirondo (Kakamega) to Provincial Agricultural Officer Nyanza Province, December 1, 1936.

- KNA, Economic and Finance Committee on Native Labour in Kenya, August 1924.
- KNA, Agr/KMS/1/666, Letter from Agricultural Officer Nyanza Province to the General Manager, Kenya Farmers Association, February 18, 1935.
- KNA, PC/NZA/3/2/29, Crop Production: Specific crops, maize, 1933-1939.
- KNA, Agr/5/1/205, Agriculture: Policy Development of Agriculture in Native Areas.
- KNA, Lab/5/20, Labour Reports and Returns, Annual Report, 1939.
- KNA, Development of Agriculture, Annual Reports, 1920-1975.
- KNA, DC/NN/1/8 North Kavirondo, District Annual Reports, 1910-1948.
- KNA, Labour Reports and Returns, Annual Reports, 1920-1960.
- KNA, IMC Box 239, Kenya: Native Labour.
- KNA, Labour Department, Annual Reports. 1930-1960.
- KNA, PC/NZA/2/20/26, Labour Office Commissioner on Juvenile Labour and Recruitment.
- KNA, PC/NZA/2/26, Letter from Abaluhya Welfare Association.

### 3. Government Publications (Kenya).

- Republic of Kenya (ROK), Development Plan, 1974-1978, Nairobi, Government Printer, 1973.
- ROK, Development Plan, 1989-1993, Nairobi, Government Printer, 1988.
- ROK, District Forms For Rural Development, Nairobi, Government Printer, 1985.
- ROK, Economic Survey, 1978, Central Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Finance and Planning, Nairobi, Government Printer, 1977.
- ROK, Economic Survey 1989, Nairobi, Government Printer, 1988.
- ROK, Economic Survey 1990, Nairobi, Government Printer, 1989.

ROK, Women of Kenya: Review and Evaluation of Progress,  
Nairobi, Government Printer, 1985.

#### 4. Newspapers.

East African Standard, 1970-1985

Manchester Guardian, 13 March, 1939.

Sunday Post, 23 August, 1964.

The New Statesman, 7 January, 1939.

The Times, 1920-1940.

Voice of Women, 1960-1974.

#### 5. Oral Interviews.

Agricultural Extension Officer, Tongaren Division, Bungoma District, 1988.

Agricultural Finance Co-operation (AFC) Official, Bungoma District, 1988.

Ayiela, Florence. Bunyore, Kakamega, 11 August, 1987.

Barasa, Ruth. Sirisia, Bungoma, 7 February, 1988.

Bukokhe, Melab. Soy Sambu, Tongareni, Bungoma 3/11/1987.

Elima, Regina. Saboti, Bungoma 14/9/1987.

Jumba, Martha. Chairperson, Kaliyesa Women's Group, Ndal, Tongaren, 29th January, 1988.

Kamili, Maritina. Kabuchai, Bungoma 8/2/1988.

Khisa, Johnston. Kimilili, 20 April, 1988.

Kukubo, Jeremiah. Bungoma District. October 2, 1987. Kukubo worked as a colonial Chief in Bungoma District (Malakisi Location). He is a respected elder because of his balanced judgement and knowledge of the past.

Kasuti, Wanyonyi. Chwele (Mukuyuni) Bungoma, 7/12/87.

Kisuya, Peter. Chwele, Bungoma 20/8/1987.



- Luvyi, Pheobe. Chairperson of Chango Women's Group, Majengo, Kakamega, 6th, March 1988.
- Matumbayi, Sipora. Kibingei, Kimilili, Bungoma 3/9/1987.
- Mukhwana, Enock. Bungoma, 18 February, 1988.
- Mulia, Margaret. Ndalulungwa, Tongaren, 2nd, March 1988.
- Mumelo, Frida. Chairperson, Lurende Women's Group, Kanduyi, Bungoma, 7th, April 1988.
- Munoko, Marita. Sirisia, Bungoma, 10th, April, 1988.
- Nabalayo, Reali. Butonge, Bungoma, 4th, March 1988.
- Nabalokha, Joshua. Chwele (Mukuyuni) Bungoma, 23/3/1988.
- Nabwala, Sara. Wamono, Bungoma 14 February, 1988.
- Naliaka, Elizabeth. Kimilili, Bungoma, 20th, March 1988.
- Naliaka, Lusabeti. Kimilili, 10 March, 1988.
- Namuleyi, Julia. Lugari, Kakamega, 6th, December 1987.
- Namulala, Luka. Musese, Bungoma District, 10 November, 1987.
- Nekese, Loyce. Musese, Bungoma District, 4th, March 1988.
- Situma, Simon. Lubaoa, Kakamega, 4/10/1987.
- Wafula, Jacob. Community Development Assistant (C.D.A.), Ndalulungwa Location, Kitale, 3rd, April 1988.
- Wachosi, Susan. Chebukaka, Mukuyuni Bungoma, 4/8/1987.
- Wangwe, Miriam. Butonge, Malakisi Sirisia, 2/3/1988.
- Wanyonyi, Musa. Sirisia (Bungoma), 14 February, 1988.
- Wanyonyi, Selina. Lukhome, Bungoma District, 19 October, 1987.
- Wanyonyi, Paulina. Chwele (Namwela), Sirisia Bungoma, 27/3/1988.
- Waswa, Shadrack. Moi's Bridge, Kitale, 5/1/1988.
- Wepukhulu, Temeteo. Wamono, 3 February, 1988.

Secondary Sources.

1. BOOKS.

Aleke-Dondo, C. et al. Mobilization of the Informal Sector for Kenya's Development: Informal Sector Workshop Report, Vol. I-IV, Nairobi, National Council For Science and technology and Friedrich Ebert Foundation, 1986.

Anderson, J. The Struggle for Education, London, Longman, 1970.

Bay, E. Women in Africa, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1976.

Beneria, Lourdes. Production, Reproduction and the Sexual Division of Labour, ILO, 1978.

——— (ed.), Women and Development: the Sexual Division of Labour in Rural Societies: a Study, New York, Praeger, 1982.

——— The Crossroads of Class and Gender: Industrial Homework, Sub-constructing and Household Dynamics in Mexico City, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1987.

Booth, Ann and R. M. Sundraum. Labour Absorption in Agriculture: Theoretical Analysis and Empirical Investigations, New York, Oxford University Press, 1985.

Boserup, Ester. Women's Role in Economic Development, Irdn, Earthscan Publications, 1989.

Brett, E.A. Colonialism and Underdevelopment in East Africa: the Politics of Economic Change, 1919-1939, Nairobi, Heinemann, 1973.

Caplan, Patricia, and Janet M. Bujra (eds.) Women United, Women Divided, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1979.

Carlsen, John. Economic and Social Transformation in Rural Kenya, Copenhagen, Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, Uppsala, 1980.

Carr, Marilyn. Blacksmith, Baker, Roofing-sheet Maker: Employment for Rural Women in Developing Countries, London, Intermediate Technology Publications, 1984.

- Chambers, Robert. Managing Rural Development: Ideas and Experience from East Africa, Connecticut, Kumarian Press, 1986.
- Chuta, E. and C. Liedholm. Rural Non-Farm Employment: a Review of the State of Art, Michigan State University Rural Development Paper No. 4, Michigan State University, 19
- Clayton, Anthony and David Savage Government and Labour in Kenya 1895-1963, London, Frank Cass, 1974.
- Clayton, E.S. Agrarian Development in Peasant Economies, Oxford, Pergamon Press, 1964.
- Cleave, John H. African Farmers: Labour Use in the Development of Smallholder Agriculture, New York, Praeger Publishers, 1974.
- Cohen, David William. and E.S. Atieno-Odhiambo Siaya: the Historical Anthropology of an African Landscape, Nairobi, Heinemann, 1989.
- Cooper, Frederick. From Slaves to Squatters: Plantation Labour and Agriculture in Zanzibar and Coastal Kenya, 1890-1925, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1980.
- De Soto, Hernando. The Other Path: the Invisible Revolution in the Third World, New York, Harper and Row Publishers, 1989.
- De Wilde, John C. Experiences with Agricultural Development in Tropical Africa, Volume 1: The Synthesis, Baltimore, Maryland. The John Hopkins Press, 1967.
- D'Onofrio-Flores, Pamela. and Sheila M. Pfafflin Scientific - Technological Change and the Role of Women in Development, Boulder, Westview Press, 1982.
- Earthy, Dora. Valenge Women, London, Frank Cass, 1968.
- Engels, F. The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State, New York, Pathfinder Press, 1983.
- Evans-Pritchard, E.E. The Nuer, New York, Oxford University Press, 1940.
- Fearn, H. An African Economy: a Study of the Economic Development of Nyanza Province of Kenya, 1903-1953, London, Cambridge University Press, 1961.

- Fox, Bonnie. (ed.) Hidden in the Household: Women's Domestic Labour Under Capitalism, Toronto, Canadian Women's Educational Press, 1980.
- Freeman, Donald B. and Glen B. Norcliff. Rural Enterprise in Kenya: Development and Spatial Organization of the Non-Farm Sector, Chicago, The University of Chicago, Department of Geography, Research Paper No. 214, 1985.
- Furley, D. W. and T. Watson. A History of Education in East Africa, New York, Nok Publishers, 1978.
- Goodwin, June. Cry Amandla: South African Women and the Question of Power, New York, Africana Publications, 1984.
- Gulliver, P.H. The Family Heads: a Study of two Pastoral Tribes in East Africa, London, Routledge and Paul Kegan, 1955.
- Guyer, Jane I. Family and Farm in Southern Cameroon, Boston, Boston University Press, 1984.
- Hailey, Lord. An African Survey, London, Oxford University Press, 1938.
- Hesse-Biber, Sharlene. Women and Work, Mayfield Publications, 1984.
- Hindess, B. and P.Q. Hirst Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production, London, Routledge and Paul Kegan, 1975.
- Hobley, C.H. Kenya From Chartered Company to Crown Colony, London, Oxford University Press, 1929.
- Bantu Beliefs and Magic, London, Frank Cass, 1967.
- Hopkins, A. G. An Economic History of West Africa, New York, Columbia University Press, 1973.
- Humphrey, Norman. The Liguuru and the Land: Sociological Aspects of Some Agricultural Problems of North Kavirondo, Nairobi, Government Printer, 1947.
- ISIS, Women in Development: a Resource Guide for Organisation and Action, International Information and Communication Service, Men Society Publishers, 1984.
- International Centre for Public Enterprise in Developing Countries, The Role of Women in Developing Countries: a Study, Ljubljana, Yugoslavia, 1986.

- International Labour Organisation (ILO), Women's Employment Patterns, Discrimination and Promotion of Equality in Africa: the Case of Kenya, Addis Ababa, ILO, Jobs and Skills Programme for Africa, 1986.
- Youth Employment and Youth Employment programmes in Africa: a Comparative Sub-regional Study, the Case of Kenya, Addis Ababa, Jobs and Skills Programmes for Africa, 1986.
- Child Labour: a Briefing Manual, Geneva, 1986.
- Employment, Incomes and Equality: a Strategy for Increasing Productive employment in Kenya, ILO. Geneva, 1972.
- Kayongo-male, Diana. and P. Walji Children and Work in Kenya, Nairobi, Oxford University Press, 1984.
- Kitching, Gavin. Class and Economic Change in Kenya: the Making of an African Petite-Bourgeoisie, 1905-1970, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1980.
- Kongstad, Per and Mette Monsted Family Labour and trade in Western Kenya, Copenhagen, 1979.
- Kuhn, Annette and AnnMarie Wolpe, Feminism and Materialism: Women and Modes of Production, London, Boston, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978.
- Leys, Norman. Kenya, London, Hogarth Press, 1925.
- Little, K. L. African Women in Towns, London, Cambridge University Press, 1973.
- Livingston, Ian. Rural Development, Employment and Incomes in Kenya: Report, ILO, (JASPA), Aldershot, Hampshire, Gower, 1986.
- Mamdani, M. Politics of Class Formation in Uganda, New York, Monthly Review Press, 1976.
- Mann, Kristin. Marrying Well: Marriage, State and Social Change Among the Educated Elite in Colonial Lagos, Cambridge, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1985.
- March, K.S. and R.L. Taqqu Women's Informal Associations in Developing Countries: Catalysts for Change? Boulder, Westview Press, 1986.
- Marx, Karl. Capital, Vol. 1, London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1970.

- Meek, C.K. Land Law and Customs in the Colonies, London, Oxford University Press, 1946.
- Moock, Joyce L. (ed.) Understanding Africa's Households and Farming Systems, Boulder, Westview Press, 1986.
- Morris, P. and A. Somerset. The African Entrepreneur, New York, Africana Publications, 1972.
- Mungeam, G.H. British Rule in Kenya, 1895-1912, London, Oxford University Press, 1966.
- Nzula, Potekhin I. I. A. and A. Z. Zusamovich. Forced Labour in Colonial Africa, London, Zed Press, 1979.
- Oakley, A. The Sociology of housework, London, Martin Robertson, 1974.
- Obbo, Christine. African Women: Their Struggle for Economic Independence, London, Zed Press, 1980.
- Oboler, Regina Smith. Women, Power and Economic Change: the Nandi of Kenya, Stanford, California, Stanford University Press, 1985.
- Ojany, Francis F. and Reuben B. Ogendo. Kenya: a Study in Physical and Human Geography, Nairobi, Longman, 1973.
- Oliver, R. The Missionary Factor in East Africa, London, Longman, 1968.
- Orde Browne, Granville. The African Labourer, London, Frank Cass, 1967.
- P'Bitek, Okot. Song of Lawino and Ocol, Nairobi, Heinemann, 1970.
- Pala, Achola. African Women in Rural Development: Research Trends and Priorities, (OLC Paper No. 2), Washington D.C., Overseas Liaison Committee, American Council on Education, 1976.
- Palmer, R. and N. Parsons (eds.) Roots of Rural Poverty in Central and Southern Africa, London, Heinemann, 1977.
- Parpart, Jane L. and Sharon Sticher (eds.) Patriarchy and Class: African Women in the Home and Workforce, Boulder, Westview Press, 1988.
- Paulme, Denise. Women of Tropical Africa, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963.

- Robertson, Claire. Sharing the Same Bowl: a Socioeconomic History of Women and Class in Accra, Ghana, Bloomington, Indiana University press, 1984.
- Rogers, Barbara. Domestication of Women: Discrimination in Developing Societies, New York, Tavistock Publishers, 1980.
- Ross, William McGregor. Kenya From Within: A Short Political History, London, Frank Cass, 1968.
- Sandbrook, Richard and R. Cohen. The Development of an African Working Class, London, Longman, 1975.
- Saffiot, Heleith I. B. Women in Class Society, New York, Monthly Review Press, 1978.
- Schuster, I. New Women of Lusaka, Palo Alto, California, Mayfield Publishing, 1979.
- Sorrenson, M.P.K. Origins of European Settlement in Kenya, Nairobi, Oxford University Press, 1968.
- Stamp, Patricia. Technology, Gender and Power in Africa, Technical Study 63e, IDRC, Ottawa, 1989.
- Stichter, S. Migrant Labour in Kenya: Capitalism and African Response, 1895-1975, London, Longman, 1982.
- Migrant Labourers, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985.
- Strobel, Margaret. Muslim Women in Mombasa 1890-1975, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1979.
- Swindell, Ken. Farm Labour, London, Cambridge University Press, 1980.
- Thomas, Barbara. Politics, Participation and Poverty: Development Through Self-Help in Kenya, Boulder, Westview Press, 1985.
- United Nations, World Survey on the Role of Women in Development, New York, 1986.
- Van Zwanenberg, R.M.A. Colonial Capitalism and Labour in Kenya 1919-1939, Kampala, East Africa Literature Bureau, 1975.
- Van Zwanenberg, R.M.A. and Anne King An Economic History of Kenya and Uganda, 1800-1970, New Jersey, Atlantic Highlands, Humanities Press, 1975.

- Wagner, Gunter. The Bantu of Western Kenya, Vol. 1, London, Oxford University Press, 1970.
- The Bantu of North Kavirondo, Vol. 2 The Economic Life, London, Oxford University Press, 1956.
- Were, G. S. A History of the Abaluhya of Western Kenya, Nairobi, East African Publishing House, 1967.
- Westley, Sidney B. (ed.) The Informal Sector in Kenya: Occasional Paper no. 25, Institute of development Studies, University of Nairobi, 1978
- Wickins, Peter Lionel. Africa 1800-1980: An Economic History, Cape Town, Oxford University Press, 1986.
- Wills, Roy G. The Fipa and Related Peoples of South-West Tanzania and North-East Zambia: Ethnographic Survey of Africa, London, International Africa Institute, 1966.
- Wipper, Audrey. Rural Rebels: A Study of Two Protest Movements in Kenya, London, Oxford University Press, 1977.
- Wolff, Richard D. The Economics of Colonialism, Britain and Kenya, 1870-1930, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1974.
- World Bank, Kenya: The Role of Women in Economic Development, Washington D.C., New York, 1989.
- Kenya: Population and Development, Washington, D. C., IBRD. 1983.
- Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth, Washington D.C, 1989.

### 1. Articles.

- Abbott, Susan. "Women's Importance for Kenyan Rural Development," Community Development Journal, 10, 3 (1975).
- Afonja, Simi. "Changing Modes of Production and the Sexual Division of Labour Among the Yoruba," Signs, 7, 2 (1981).
- Beneria, Lourdes. "Conceptualizing the Labour Force: the Underestimation of Women's Economic Activities," Journal of Development Studies, 17, 3 (1981).



- "Reproduction, Production and the Sexual Division of Labour," Cambridge Journal of Economics, 3, 3 (1979).
- and Gita Sen. "Class and Gender Inequalities and Women's Roles in Economic Development: Theoretical and Practical Implications," Feminist Studies, 8 (1980).
- Bernard, Frank E. "Meru District in the Kenya Spatial Economy, 1890-1950," in D. R. F. Taylor and R. A. Obudho (eds.), The Spatial Structure of Development: a Study of Kenya, Boulder, Colorado, Westview Press, 1979.
- Bernstein, Harry. "African Peasantries: A Theoretical Framework," The Journal of Peasant Studies, 6, 4 (1979), pp. 421-443.
- "Notes on Capital and Peasantry," Review of African Political Economy, 10 (1978).
- Bifani, Patricia. "Women and Development in Africa: A Tentative Approach Through Scenario Building," The Journal of Eastern African Research and Development, 15, (1985).
- Bujra, Janet M. "Introductory: Female Solidarity and the Sexual Division of Labour," in Patricia Caplan and Janet Bujra Women United, Women Divided: Comparative Studies of the Contemporary Cultures, Bloomington, Indiana University press, 1979.
- "Urging Women to Redouble Their Efforts: Class, Gender and Capitalist Transformation in Africa," in Claire Robertson and Iris Berger (eds.) Women and Class in Africa, New York, Africana Publishing, 1986.
- Canfield, Mina Davis. "Imperialism, the Family and Cultures of Resistance," Socialist Revolutions, 20 (October, 1974).
- Davison, Jean. "Women's non-Formal Education in Kenya: the Role of Self-help Groups," Basic Education Research Centre, Bulletin No. 12, (1984), pp. 15-19.
- Deere, C. D. "Rural Women Subsistence Production in the Capitalist Periphery," Review of Radical Political Economics, 8, 1 (Spring 1976).
- Eshwan, G. E. "Women's Access to Higher Education in Kenya: a Study of Opportunities and Attainment in Science and Mathematics Education," The Journal of Eastern African Research and Development, 15, (1985), pp. 91-110.

- Feldman, Fahay. "Women's Groups and Subordination: An Analysis of Politics Towards Rural Women in Kenya," Review of African Political Economy, 27/28 (1983).
- Freund, Bill. "Labour and Labour History in Africa: A Review of the Literature," The Journal of African Studies Association, (1985).
- Ghai, D. "Some Basic Needs: From Words to Action with Illustrations from Kenya," International Labour Review, 119, 3 (May-June 1980), pp. 367-379.
- Gita, Sen. "The Sexual Division of Labour and the Working-Class Family: Towards a Conceptual Synthesis of Class Relations and the Subordination of Women," The Review of Radical Political Economics, 12, 2 (1980).
- Good, Kenneth. "Settler Colonialism: Economic Development and Class Formation," Journal of Modern African Studies, 14, 4 (1976), pp. 597-620.
- Guyer, Jane I. "Households and Community in African Studies," African Studies Review, 24 (1984).
- "The Food Economy and French Colonial Rule in Central Cameroon," Journal of African History, 29, 4 (1978), pp. 577-597.
- "Female Farming and the Evolution of Food Production patterns Amongst the Beti of South-Central Cameroon," Africa, 50, 4 (1980).
- Hakansasson, Thomas. "Family Structure, Bride-wealth and Environment in Eastern Africa: a Comparative Study of Home-property System," Ethnology: An International Journal of Culture and Social Anthropology, 28, 2 (1989).
- Hartmann, Heidi. I. "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union," in Sergent (ed.) Women and Revolution: A Discussion of the Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism, Boston, South end Press, 1982.
- "Capitalism, Patriarchy and Job Segregation by Sex," Signs, 1, 3 (1976), pp. 137-169.
- "The Family as the Locus of Gender, Class and Political Struggle: The Example of Housework," Signs, 6, 3 (Spring 1981), pp. 366-394.

- Harvie, C. H. "Some Basic Ideas on the Informal Sector in Kenya," Occasional Paper No. 25, Institute for Development Studies, University of Nairobi, 1978.
- Haugerud, A. "Land Tenure and Agrarian Change in Kenya," African Journal of the International Institute, 59, 1 (1989)
- Hay, Margaret J. "Luo Women and Economic Change During the Colonial Period," in Nancy J. Hafkin and Edna G. Bay (eds.) Women in Africa: Studies in Social and Economic Change, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1976.
- Henn, Jeanne Koopman. "The Material Basis of Sexism: A Model of Production Analysis," in Jane L. Parpart and S. Stichter (eds) Patriarchy and Class: African Women in the Home and the Workforce, Boulder, Westview Press, 1988.
- Herz, Barbara. "Women in Development: Kenya's Experience," in Finance and Development, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, Washington D.C., 1989.
- "Bringing Women into the Economic Mainstream," in Finance and Development, IMF and World Bank, Washington, D.C. (December, 1989).
- Heyer, Judith and J.K. Wawern "The Development of the Small Farm Areas," in Judith Heyer et al (eds) Agricultural Development in Kenya: An Economic Assessment, Nairobi, Oxford University Press, 1976.
- "A Survey of Agricultural Development in Small Scale Areas of Kenya Since 1920s," Nairobi, Institute of Development Studies, University of Nairobi Working Paper No. 194, 1974.
- Hunter, Monica. "The Effects of Contact with Europeans on Pondo Women," Africa, 6 (1933).
- Kamene, Okonjo. "The Dual-Sex Political System in Operation: Igbo Women and Community Politics in Mid-western Nigeria," in Nancy Hafkin and Edna Bay (eds) African Women op. cit.
- Killick, A. T. "Informal Sector and Development strategy in Kenya," Occasional Paper, No. 25, Institute for Development Studies, University of Nairobi, 1978.
- Laclau, Ernesto. "Feudalism and Capitalism in Latin America," in Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory:

- Capitalism, Fascism and Population, London, New Left Books, 1977.
- Leys, Colin. "Interpreting African Underdevelopment: Reflections on the ILO Report on Employment, Incomes and Equality in Kenya," African Affairs, 27, 289 (1988), pp. 419-429.
- Little, K. L. "The Changing Position of Women in the Sierra Leone Protectorate," Africa, 18 (1948), pp. 1-17.
- Livingstone, Ian. "An Evaluation of Kenya's Rural Industrial Development Programme," Journal of Modern African Studies, 15, 2 (1977), pp. 495-504.
- Lonsdale, John. and Bruce Berman "Coping With the Contradictions: the Development of the Colonial State in Kenya, 1895-1914," The Journal of African History, 20, (1979).
- "The Development of the Labour Control System in Kenya, 1919-1929," Canadian Journal of African Studies, 14, 1 (1981).
- Low, D.A. "British East Africa: The Establishment of British Rule, 1895-1912," in V. Harlow and E.M. Chiver (eds) History of East Africa, London, Oxford University Press, 1965.
- Mackenzie, Fiona. "Land and Territory: the Interface Between Two Systems of Land Tenure, Murang'a District, Kenya," Africa Journal of the International Institute, 59, 1 (1989).
- Mackenzie, Fiona. and D.R.F. Taylor "District Farms As a Strategy in Kenya: the Case of Murang'a District, Central Province," Canadian Journal of Development Studies, 8, 2 (1987).
- MacKintosh, M. "Domestic Labour and the Household," in S. Burman and Croom (eds.), Fit Work For Women, London, 1979.
- Maleche, Albert. "A New Status for Women in Kenya," East Africa Journal, (june 1972).
- Mbithi, Philip M. "Harambee Self-Help: The Kenya Approach," The African Review, 2, 1 (1972).
- Meillassoux, C. "From Reproduction to Production: A Marxist Approach to Economic Anthropology," H. Wolpe (ed.) The Articulation of the Modes of Production: Essays From

- Economy And Society, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980.
- Memon, P. A. "Some Geographical Aspects of the History of Urban Development in Kenya," in B. A. Ogot (ed.), Economic and Social History of East Africa: Hadith 5, Nairobi, East African Publishing House, 1975.
- Molyneux, M. "Endrocentricism in Marxist Anthropology," Critique of Anthropology, 3 (1977).
- Monsted, Mette. "Women's Groups in Rural Kenya and Their Role in Development," Mimeo, Centre for Development Research, Copenhagen, 1978.
- Mwaniki, Nyaga. "Against Many Odds: the Dilemmas of Women's Self-help Groups in Mbeere, Kenya," Africa, 56, 2 (1986), pp. 210-228.
- Nash, June. "Implications of Technological Change for Household Level and Rural Development," Working Paper No. 37, Michigan State University, 1983.
- Nelson, Nici. "Women Must Help Each Other: the Operation of Personal Networks Among Buzaa Beer Brewers in Mathare," in P. Caplan and J. Bujra, (eds) Women United, Women Divided, op. cit.
- Noormohamed, S.O. "Development Strategy for the Informal Sector: The Kenya Experience," in P. Ndegwa, L. P. Mureithi and R. H. Green, Development Options for Africa in the 1980s and Beyond, Oxford University Press, 1985.
- Obbo, Christine. "Dominant Male Ideology and Female Options: Three East African Case Studies," Africa, 46 (1976)
- Okeyo, A.P. "Daughters of the Lakes and Rivers: Colonization and the Land Rights of Luo Women," in M. Etienne and E. Lea Cock (eds) Women and Colonization, New York, Praeger, 1980.
- Okoth-Ogenda, H.W.O. "The Changing System of Land Tenure and the Rights of Women," in Achola Pala et al (eds) The Participation of Women in Kenya Society, Nairobi, Kenya Literature Bureau, 1978.
- "African Land Tenure Reform," in J. Heyer et al (eds) Agricultural Development in Kenya: An Economic Assessment, Nairobi, Oxford University Press, 1976.

- Osogo, J. N. B. "Educational Development in Kenya 1911-1924 with Particular Reference to African Education," in B. A. Ogot (ed.), Hadith, 3, Nairobi, East African Publishing House, 1971.
- Oyugi, Walter Ouma. "Popular Participation and Access to Basic Needs in Kenya," in Franklin Lisk (ed.) Popular Participation in Planning for Basic Needs: Concepts, Methods and Practices, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1985.
- Pala, Achola. "The Changing Economic Position of Women in Rural Areas: Case Studies for Kisumu District, Kenya," Working Paper No. 156, IDS, University of Nairobi, 1974.
- Papanek, Hanna. "Family Status Production: the 'Work' and 'Non-Work' of Women," Signs, 4, 4 (1974), pp.775-781.
- Peter, Aaby. "Engels and Women," Critique of Anthropology, 3, 9-10 (1977), pp. 25-53.
- Presley, Cola Ann. "Labour Unrest Among the Kikuyu Women in Colonial Kenya," in Claire Robertson and Iris Berger (eds) Women and Class in Africa, op. cit.
- Rogers, Barbara. "Women and Land Rights," ISIS, International Bulletin, 11 (Spring, 1979).
- Sacks, Karen. "Engels Revisited: Women, the Organization of Production and Private Property," in Rayna R. reiter (ed.) Toward and Anthropology of Women, New York, Monthly Review Press, 1975.
- Schildkrout, Enid. "Dependence and Autonomy: the Economic Activities of Secluded Hausa Women in Kano, Nigeria," in Edna Bay (ed.) Women and Work in Africa, Boulder, Westview Press, 1982.
- "The Employment of Children in Kano," in Gerry Rogers and Guy Standing (eds), Child Work, Poverty and Underdevelopment, Geneva, ILO, 1981.
- "Women's Work and Children's Work: Variations among Muslims in Kano," in Sandra Wallman (ed.) Social Anthropology of Work, London, Academic Press, 1979.
- Schmidt, Elizabeth. "Farmers, Hunters and Gold-Washers: a Reevaluation of Women's Roles in Pre-colonial and Colonial Zimbabwe," African Economic History, 17 (1988), pp. 45-80.

- Schmink, Marianne. "Women in Brazilian Abertura Politics," Signs, 7 (1981).
- Scott, Alison MacEwen. "Who Are the Self-Employed,"
- Smith, Lawrence. "An Overview of Agricultural development Policy," in Judith Heyer, et al (eds) Agricultural Development in Kenya, op. cit.
- Smock, Audrey. "Women's Economic Roles," in Tony Killick (ed.), Papers on the Kenyan Economy: Performance, Problems and Politics. Nairobi, Heinemann, 1981.
- Spancer, I. G. R. "The First Assault on Indian Ascendancy: Indian Traders in the Kenyan Reserves," African Affairs, 80 (July 1981).
- Stamp, Patricia. "Kikuyu Women's Self-help Groups: Towards an Understanding of the Relation Between Sex-gender System and the Mode of Production in Africa," in Claire Robertson and Iris Berger (eds) Women and Class in Africa, op. cit.
- Standt, Kathlyn. "Stratification, Implications for Women's Politics," in Robertson and Berger (eds), Women and Class in Africa, op. cit.
- "Ethnic and Class Consciousness in Western Kenya," Comparative Politics, 14, 2 (1972).
- Stichter, Sharon. "Women and the Labour Force in Kenya, 1895-1964," Rural Africana, 29 (1976), pp. 45-67.
- Strobel, Margeret. "From Lelemama to Lobbying: Women's Associations in Mombasa Kenya," in Hafkin and Bay (eds) Women in Africa, op. cit.
- Stoler, Ann. "Class Structure and Female Autonomy in Rural Java," Signs, 3, 1 (1977).
- Tadesse, Zenebeworke. "Women and Technology in Peripheral Countries: an Overview," in Pamela M. D'Onofrio-Flores and Sheila M. Pfafflin (eds), Scientific-Technological Change and the Role of Women in Development, Boulder, Westview Press, 1982,
- Thomas, Barbara P. "Household Strategies for Adaptation and Change: Participation in Kenyan Rural Women's Associations," Africa, 58, 4 (1988).

- Tinker, Iren. "New Technology for Food Chain Activities: the Imperatives for Equality for Women," Washington D.C., WID Resource Centre, USAID, (n.d.).
- Uzoigwe, U. N. "Pre-colonial Markets in bunyoro-Kitara," in B. A. Ogot (ed.), Economic and Social History of East Africa, Nairobi, East Africa Publishing House, 1971.
- Van Allen, Judith. "Setting on a Man: Colonialism and the Lost Political Institutions of Igbo Women," Canadian Journal of African Studies, 6, 2 (1972).
- "Women in Africa: Modernization Means More Dependency," Centre Magazine, 12, 3 (May-June, 1974).
- Van Zwanenberg. "The Development of Peasant Commodity Production in Kenya, 1920-1940," Economic History Review, 27, 3 (1974).
- Werlin, H. H. "The Informal Sector: Implications on the ILO's Study of Kenya," African Studies Review, 17, 1 (1974), pp. 205-212.
- White, Louise. "Domestic Labour in a Colonial City: Prostitution in Nairobi, 1900-1952," in Parpart and Stichter (eds), Patriarchy and Class, op. cit.
- Wipper, Audrey. "Rural Women: Development or Underdevelopment?," Rural Africana, 29 (Winter, 1975-6).
- "The Maendeleo ya Wanawake Organization: The Co-operation of Leadership," African Studies Review, 18, (1975).
- "The Women's Equal Rights Movement in Kenya," Journal of Modern African Studies, 9, 3 (September, 1971).
- Wood, J. L. "Pre-colonial Markets in East Africa," Journal of Geographical Association of Nigeria, 17, 1 (June 1974).
- Wright, E. O. and L. Perrone. "Marxist Class Categories and Income Inequality," American Sociological Review, 42, (1971).
- Wrigley, C.C. "Aspects of Economic History of Africa," in A.D. Roberts (e d.), The Cambridge History of Africa, Vol. 7, London, Cambridge University Press, 1986.
- Zezeza, Paul T. "Women and the Labour Force in Kenya since Independence," Transafrican Journal of history, 17 (1988), pp. 69-107.



### 3. Unpublished Theses.

Breen, Rita Mary. "The Politics of Land: the Kenya Land Commission (1932-33) and its Effect on Land Policy in Kenya," Ph.D. Dissertation, Michigan University, 1976.

Hanger, Jane. "Social and Economic Aspects of the Contribution of Women to the Farm Household Economy," Ph. D. Thesis, University of East Africa, 1973.

Hay, Margaret Jean. "Economic Change in Luoland: Kowe, 1890-1945," Ph. D. Thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1972.

Nkinyangi, J. A. "Socio-Economic Determinants of Repetition and Early School Withdrawal at the Primary Level and their Implications for Education Planning in Kenya," Ph. D. Thesis, Stanford University, 1980.

Zezeza, Paul T. "Dependent Capitalism and the Making of the Kenyan Working Class During the Colonial Period," Ph.D. Thesis, Dalhousie University, 1982.

### 4. Unpublished Papers.

Cohen, John M. and Richard M. Hook "District Development Planning in Kenya," Nairobi, Ministry of Planning and National Development, 1986.

Holland, Jean. "Girls Education in Kenya," paper presented at the first Kenya Women Seminar on The Role of Women, Past, Present and Future held at the Limuru Conference Centre, 5-11 December 1960.

Ogot, B.A. "The Silence in the Old Narratives or New Trends in Cultural History," Paper presented During the ~~East~~ Africa History Conference, Navasha, 1981.

Robertson, Claire. "Women in African Agriculture: Is Southern Africa a Model for the Future?," Paper Presented at the African Studies Association, December, 1983.

Vermouth, Paul. "The Beginning of Maize Cash-Cropping in Kimilili, 1908-1935," Seminar Paper No. 13, Department of History, University of Nairobi, 1977/78.