



The Transition from Subsistence to Cash Crop Farming in Abogeta Sub County of Meru from 1937 -1980

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

This study is about a history on the transition from subsistence to cash crop farming in Abogeta Sub-County in Meru County, Kenya from 1937-1980. Before 1937 farming practices were mainly for subsistence. Crops grown included millet, sorghum, peas, arrowroots, yams, beans and cowpeas. The purpose of this study was to examine the transition from subsistence to cash crop farming in Abogeta Sub County of Meru from 1937 to 1980. It was guided by Articulation of Modes of Production theory whose main precept is that penetration of capitalism in Africa affected modes of production. The study employed descriptive research design to describe the events as they occurred systematically. The instruments of data collection were interview schedules, focused group discussions and observation schedule. The sources of data included oral sources, archival sources and secondary sources which were corroborated to meet the reliability and objectivity of the research. The study was analyzed and presented through Qualitative Data Analysis. The study revealed that traditionally people from Abogeta Sub County engaged in subsistence farming. Farming shifted to cash crop farming from 1937 with introduction of cash crops like coffee and tea. This drift was fueled by search for money and industrialization. The study also noted that the transition had both positive and negative impacts on people of Abogeta. Food insecurity and migration were noted while on positive side it became the major economic activity and hence a

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source of livelihood to those that practiced. The study may be useful to future researchers in related area. Policy makers in the government may use the study to find solutions to food insecurity in Abogeta Sub County of Meru-County.

Keywords: Cash crop; farming; food insecurity; migration; rural development.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Meru are a community in Eastern Kenya who fall under the Bantu linguistic group. Abogeta sub-county is an administrative division of the Meru people. The Meru people practiced subsistence farming. Subsistence agriculture is a self-sufficiency farming system in which the farmers focus on growing enough food to feed themselves and their entire families. The typical subsistence farm has a range of crops and animals needed by the family to feed and clothe themselves. Cash crop farming refers to a type of farming where agricultural crops are grown for the purpose of sale or to make profits, instead of subsistence or barter. It is also called commercial farming or cash crop farming. Men produced cash crops while women grew food and subsistence crops [1]. European intervention into Kenya resulted to social economic changes which affected indigenous agriculture beyond recognition. The first European to visit Meru was called Horne Kangangi (little walker) because of his diminutive stature and energetic matches throughout Meru. He Settled in Mutindwa (Meru town) by 1908. Coffee was first grown in areas around Meru town Kaithe, Murathankari,

Runogone (govt. Notice No 24 of 8/1/1935). People of Abogeta Sub County started growing cash crops when Catholic missionaries settled at Mujwa in 1911 and built a mission station there. Other Local Farmers started growing cash crops after they borrowed the ideas from other areas like Chogoria, Muthambi, Meru town and Chuka where coffee was planted. Farmers shifted to Coffee because as a cash crop, it provided money that could be used to buy clothes, utensils, paying school fees and for paying taxes to the colonial government [2]. By 1980s Shift in the agricultural sector occurred in Meru as a result of the horticultural sector and expansion of small scale farming. Farmers have abandoned growing subsistence crops and planted cash crops due to money that they earn from them hence depend on shopping centers and markets for subsistence. This motivated the study in order to investigate the changes in agricultural sector in Abogeta Sub County and how these changes have impacted on the food production among the people of Abogeta sub-county. The purpose of the study was to account for the transition from subsistence to cash crop farming in Abogeta Sub County of Meru County from 1937 and 1980.

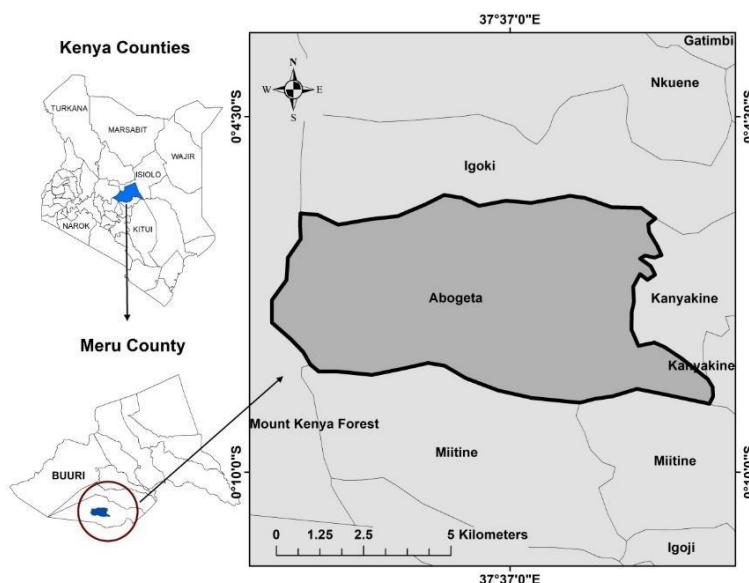


Fig. 1. Map of Abogeta Sub County
 Source: Meru County Development Plan 2008- 2012

2. METHODOLOGY

The study employed descriptive research design. According to Kathuri and Pals [3], descriptive research design is a means of ensuring that the process of data collection and presentation is systematic and scientific and the results obtained are valid and reliable. Mugenda and Mugenda [4] notes that Descriptive research is a process of collecting data in order to answer questions concerning the current status of the problem of the subjects in the study and that it determines and reports the study findings as they are. This design was used to investigate the modes of agriculture embraced by the people of Abogeta Sub County during the period 1937-1980. This study described, recorded, analysed, reported and presented the findings of the study as they exist. Thus a descriptive research design suited the study as it enabled the researcher to give valid and reliable findings.

3. DATA ANALYSIS, PROCEDURE AND PRESENTATION

Data was analyzed by the use Qualitative Data Analyses. Qualitative Data Analyses was be used to describe the modes of agriculture in Abogeta Sub County, transition from food crop to cash crop farming in Abogeta Sub County between 1937 and 1980 and implications of the changes to food production. This data was merged and transcribed into written texts. Oral data was thematically analysed and corroborated using secondary sources. Finally, data was merged from various data instruments to ensure consistency in data presentation.

Data was collected using interview schedules, Focus Group Discussions (FDGs) and observation schedules. Interviews were conducted on a one-on-one basis. In focus discussion groups, a group of six farmers were gathered together to clarify information on agricultural practices before introduction of cash crops. Open and closed -ended questions to obtain information. During the process the researcher took notes and record important points from fourteen farmers.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

Coward [5] analyzed the transition from subsistence to commercial agriculture in

developing nations. He attributed the transition in agricultural sector to modernization. Baran [6] in his book *Political Economic Growth* argues that the implementation of capitalism in the colonized world had resulted in economic stagnation and social backwardness. This was due to expansion of capitalism into the colonial world which led to destruction of indigenous economies and appropriation of surplus production. Baran used under development theory. In Meru County as noted by Goheen [7] farmers embraced planting cash crops in portions of land that food crops were grown.

4.2 Agriculture in Abogeta Sub-County before 1937

Before introduction of cash crops in 1937 the people of Abogeta practiced crop production, livestock rearing and hunting of wild game. The agricultural economy was mainly subsistence, ensuring production of sufficient food to last until the next season.

Food crops grown included millet, sorghum, yams, arrowroots, peas, bananas and finger millet among others. Millet was used for making gruel, Black beans (*ncabi*) were eaten with mashed bananas and vegetables.

Maize was introduced in Meru in the 1910s by the Portuguese from the coast. Various African communities had resisted the introduction of maize in Kenya, Muchoki [8]. The people accepted it as the customary and appropriate bases of the Meru meal. Maize was accepted as it could provide flour for cooking ugali and porridge (KNA/DC/MRU/I/4/1938).

PDA Embu/1/155(1951-1963) [9] archival documentation has information on Kaguru farmers training center that was established to train farmers on growing of cash crops like coffee, tomatoes papaws, livestock breeds and onions. This encouraged farmers in Abogeta Sub County to change from growing subsistence crops to growing cash crops. Farmers in Abogeta Sub County were encouraged to attend training courses at Kaguru where they were trained how to grow cash crops like coffee, bananas, cabbages and livestock farming. Cash crops grown in Meru included coffee, vines and grapes. Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KARI) was started at Embu in 1979 to promote agriculture by providing seeds and improved breeds of livestock. This led to introduction of cash crops like French beans, paw paws and onions new

variety of bananas commonly known as Kampala.

4.3 Introduction of Cash Crops in Abogeta Sub-County

According to Mwaniki [10] cash crops like coffee, tea, and pyrethrum were introduced in Meru by Europeans between 1937 and 1950s. These crops were introduced by the first European in Meru Horne Kangangi. For long time Kenyan Africans had no right to grow coffee by the colonial administration. It was claimed that Africans had no technical knowledge required in producing coffee, there was fear by Europeans that African coffee would spread diseases to European coffee and Europeans feared competition from Africans in the market. (Garst, 1972:125) Europeans expected Africans to offer labour in settler farms and that was the reason behind discouraging them from growing cash crops.

4.4 Swynnerton Plan

Through the Swynnerton plan, Kenya moved from a position of virtual neglect of African agricultural to the forefront among African territories regarding indigenous development. Thus 1954 is a key date for ideological and practical change in Kenya. Since the second world war it had been clear to the government and colonial office that the condition and productivity of African lands needed immediate and drastic attention. The traditional system of succession and inheritance had produced small fragmented land holdings on which it was impossible, even if the knowledge existed, to use modern agricultural techniques.

Africans were more frustrated by their inability to break out of their subsistence cycle. Moreover, the colony as a whole suffered from this enormous handicap to greater economic viability. Consequently, R.J.M Swynnerton, the assistant director of agriculture prepared a plan which would achieve some of the issues pinpointed in 1947 by Governor Mitchell and was dispatched to the colonial office on the Agrarian problem in Kenya (Nairobi). Swynnerton himself a career agricultural officer with substantial service in Kenya prior to 1954, had received praise and support inside and outside Kenya for the conception of this extremely significant plan.

According to Swynnerton, the architect of the plan after whom it was named argued that:

Sound agricultural development is dependent upon a system of land tenure which will make available to African farmer a unit of land and a system of farming whose production could support his family at a level, taking into account prerequisites derived from the farm, comparable with other occupation. He must be provided with such security of tenure through an indivisible title as will encourage him to invest his labour and profits into the development of his farm that will enable him to offer his security against such financial credits as he may wish to secure from such sources [11,10].

Swynnerton plan revolutionised land tenure in Abogeta sub County. Nkoroi (O.1, 2000) informed the researcher that before the Swynnerton plan clan elders had authority to allocate land to different households. Each clan had its own plot of land where people could settle, cultivate and graze animals. Portions of land were set apart for communal activities like circumcision rituals and wells where animals were watered. It was common for elders to declare part of land as arable for cultivation while the other was set free for grazing (*buuri*).

The colonial government policy of recommendations of June 1954 that: government to encourage the emergence of the individual land tenure among the Africans in areas where conditions are ripe for it and in due course, to institute a system of registration.

KNA/MRU/11/6/1/1933 Dr A.C Irvine encouraged growing of coffee by natives in the Chogoria area in order to improve the economic position of the people. Coffee was planted at Chogoria mission in about one acre of land .Coffee growing was encouraged in order to enable the natives obtain money to pay hut tax and any work in the reserves.

According to Muguongo, (O.1,2000) chiefs and significant number of the early educated members of the society were among the first coffee growers. They were motivated by a combination of reasons including the expectation of earning a greater income. Money got from sales of coffee could be used to pay tax, pay school fees and buy household items.

According to Susan Whitin Almy [12] a large number of farmers especially in Abogeta and Nkuene turned to potatoes and cabbage planting for cash and subsistence needs. Many families in Abogeta shifted from sorghum and millet for

subsistence to Irish potatoes mixed with beans and bananas. The market for cabbages was restricted to individuals and few institutional buyers in the local area because they had to be sold after picking. Potatoes stood the rigors of transportation, better but they incurred heavy competition from the sellers in the Kibirichia settlement scheme where potatoes were first introduced in Meru on a large scale. Dionesio (O.I, 2000) informed the researcher that after attending Kaguru farmers training center in 1957 he learnt how to grow cabbages, potatoes, onions and bananas for sale. He gave information that sale of cash crops could provide him with money that he used to pay school fees and buy household items.

Susan Whitin Almy [12] noted that most of the food crops did not grow easily in the cold regions of Meru and many farmers had to purchase large supplements to their diets. Maize especially required eight to nine months from planting to harvest above 6000 feet, while in the lower altitude farmers got two crops per year. Farmers in these areas plant tea and cabbages. The researcher observed that in Abogeta upper Kithangari areas, farms are planted with tea, cabbages and carrots. Mutua (0.1 2000) informed the researcher that he planted tea because tea could provide money on monthly basis.

Coffee growing in Abogeta started after farmers borrowed the ideas from neighbouring communities of Chogoria, Muthambi and Chuka where it was first grown. Muthuci (O.I,2020) informed the researcher that he got his coffee plants from Muthambi where he was employed as farm labourer. According to him coffee sales provided him with money that he used to pay taxes.

According to Mikua (O.I ,2020), not every farmer was able to grow coffee in Abogeta due to financial constraints. The chiefs, teachers, preachers, clerks and those employed by colonial administrators were the first people to grow coffee as a cash crops. Native coffee production began slowly but steadily increased during 1940s, and coffee experiments used to justify the legalization of African participation in export crop production in 1954. The respondents gave information of other crops like maize, beans that were introduced in Abogeta during the colonial period.

Colonial capital accumulation was based on the appropriation of surplus created by the cheap

and lowly paid African labour, Embu and others in Nairobi as house servants in order to get money to pay tax.

The other phase of the Swynnerton plan was provision adequate marketing facilities, preferably cooperative societies to give farmers secure and profitable outlets for crops and livestock products. In 1957 there were about 310 African societies. At the end of 1959 there were about 460 cooperative societies with a membership of 1800 growers (KNA/MRU/11/2/1/529).

4.5 Land Ordinance Nos. 27 and 28 of 1959

The registration, consolidation and adjudication of holdings prior the registration of rights thus has its own agricultural value as well as its social-economic role of providing "security in individual tenure and individual tenure which had evolved. What gave effects to Swynnerton plan are several statutory enactments on land passed by the legislative council in 1959 as the native lands legislative ordinance (No.27), the land control (Native lands) ordinance (No 28) and the land titles (Amendment) ordinance. These are the legal mechanisms which at least for the expanding sector of the population possessing individual free hold tenure have fused native law and custom with English law into new unified Kenya land law. The 1959 ordinance the African customary tenure was narrowed geographically.

According to Kwiriga (0.1 2020)the 1960 land ordinance ensured that land adjudication in Abogeta was carried out. He gave information that land adjudication in Abogeta was effected from 1964-1967. Land control ordinance set up included provincial control board, which had consent or refusal powers over transfer of land. District control boards consisting of local Africans and Kikuyus had to give consent for any land transaction. Kwiriga informed the researcher of Njuguna who was in charge of land demarcation in Abogeta.

The land policies contributed to internal differences among the people of Abogeta as some had large portions of land than others. Grazing areas were restricted by boundaries which meant that no communal grazing and free movement from one place to another. The policies chose to replace the indigenous land tenure system of the people which negatively affected land ownership and system of crop

production. The policies encouraged people to produce excess food for consumption and for export. According to Mungiria (0.1,2020) introduction of cash crops in Abogeta led to changes on the modes of production of the people of Abogeta. He gave information on how farmers took to growing cash crops of cotton, tobacco coffee and tea. Cotton was introduced in Mitunguu by 1971. According to Mungiria men could go to work at Mitunguu settlement scheme in order to get money for school fees and payment of taxes.

4.6 Agriculture Policies after Independence

After independence in 1963 president Mzee Jomo Kenyatta undertook to fight problems that affected the people of Kenya. These were poverty, ignorance and diseases. To fight poverty he put on a development policy of "Uhuru na Kazi" in 1964. This aimed at encouraging the people of Kenya to work hard in order to provide the nation with food crops for subsistence and cash crops for export. Settlement schemes were created like the million-acre scheme which were large estates for Europeans and settlement schemes and settlement schemes were created to settle the landless peasant farmers. In Abogeta European settlements were created at Kaguru farm and Marimba farm (Leo, 1984). Kaguru farm was started by Europeans to grow cash crops of coffee, onions, cabbages coffee, and livestock keeping. Labour in the farm was supplied by the people of Abogeta after they were recruited by chiefs and elders.

Mungiria (0.1, 2000) gave information of Kabubua the colonial chief in Abogeta who recruited strong men to supply labour in European farm at Kaguru and other projects like clearing roads. Digging terraces and planting trees. After independence the government took over the farm to act as a training centre for farmers. This promoted agrarian transition in the agricultural sectors. Farmers opted to grow cash crops for sale in order to get money which could be used to pay school fees and buy other household items. This study finding agrees with the findings of Coward (1969) who attributed the transition from subsistence to commercial agriculture in developing nations to modernization.

Land reform continued in independent Kenya as a matter of policy. The Kenya development plan (1970-74) pointed that land tenure system in

Africa areas of Kenya should be changed, so that the farmers can be provided with title deeds to their land where necessary so that scattered fragments of land can be consolidated into one holding (Development Plan 1970-74).

The introduction of new crops that were considered more marketable started to replace the traditional maize, sorghum, millet which were the chief grains produced by the people of Abogeta.

Kwiriga (O. I, 2020) a respondent gave information on how he went to get Napier grass for planting from Kaguru farmers training Centre. He gave information on how he reduced the piece of land which food crops like sorghum, millet and yams were grown to plant napier grass. The number of goats and sheep were reduced because the grazing lands were no longer there.

Karunga [13] has written on agriculture in 1970s and 1980s. He argues that agriculture in the 1970s and 1980s was donor driven as donors greatly influenced agricultural practices. This was the period when District focus for rural development programmes (DFRD). This programme was formed in 1980s in order to devolve funds for development in the rural areas to promote agriculture development. Donors invested in rural development programmes like rural access roads, storage facilities, production and marketing facilities like coffee factories, tea processing facilities [14]. This programme assisted farmers in Abogeta as they could transport their products to market centers like Kanyakine, Ntharene and Mwiciune.

Murungi (O.1,2000) informed the researcher that when the rural access road from Baranga to Mwiciune was developed he was able to transport his coffee to Kaguru factory with ease because his bicycle could be used on the road. He also gave information on how the then member of parliament Hon Kabere Mbijiwe put sand (murrum) on Nkubu-Mitunguu road which enabled transportation of food crops from Mitunguu to Nkubu and other areas. This made it possible to transport horticultural products of French beans, pawpaws, bananas from Mitunguu to Nkubu then to Nairobi through the Nkubu-Nairobi route.

The Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPS) of 1980 for the agricultural sector focused on market liberalization and price control which

aimed at reducing rent extracted through the market chain by elites [15]. This programme benefited different groups of accumulators at different times [16]. Liberalism led to gradual emergence of middle farmers in the coffee sector and tea growing zones. The short 45-75-day production and payment cycle for French, beans dairy farming and other export vegetables were indicators of transition in the agricultural sector in Abogeta.

The development of cooperative societies formed an important step in the growth of coffee industry in Meru district. The functions of the societies were to process and marketing of the crop and the running government supervised factories. The three years 1947-1949 showed expansion of acreage in different areas. The limitations of development were capital, security of trained supervisory staff and the inability of existing nurseries to keep pace with the demand for young trees.

John (O.I, 2020) informed the researcher that he started growing bananas and French beans and keeping livestock after the coffee prices declined resulting to no pay. During this time, cooperative societies sprout within the region hence enhancing dairy farming. These findings are in line with archival evidence PDA/Embu/1/155(1951-1963) archival documentation has information on Kaguru farmers' training centre established to train farmers on growing of cash crops like coffee, tomatoes papaws, livestock breeds and onions.

In a focused Group Discussion an interview schedule the respondents gave the information that the growing of cash crops was attributed to economic gains Money from cash crops was used to pay taxes, pay school fees, buy clothes, sugar salt and other household items. This is in line with Brown and Kennedy [17] findings, cash crop growing in Zimbabwe was associated with higher income. Cash crops could be marketed hence enabling households' increase their rural income.

Transition in the agricultural industries affected traditional industries like weaving, basketry, blacksmith and pottery. According Manyara (O.I , 2020) the researcher gathered information on how transition in the agricultural sector occurred in the pottery and weaving industries. According to her traditional industries pottery, weaving and basketry were affected as people in the pottery industries paid more attention to cash crop

growing at the expense of pots production. She gave information that when cash economy was introduced in Meru European goods like sufurias were introduced which replaced the pots in cooking, mattresses replaced, mats pangas and knives affected the work of blacksmiths and this led to decline of traditional industries. She gave information that the cash economy made her forget weaving activities as her husband denied her permission to weave matts and instead forced her to harvest coffee.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The study revealed that during the period of 1937-1980, farmers started shifting from subsistence to cash crop farming. Crops like tea and coffee replaced traditional food crops like arrowroots and yams. Large portions of land were set aside for cash crop farming, leaving very little for food production. Money economy also replaced barter trade. Factories started coming up and the youths migrated in search for jobs in these factories leaving farming to the aged. This transition was fueled mainly by search for money coupled with industrialization.

The study concluded that the transition from subsistence to cash crop farming had both positive and negative impacts to the people of Abogeta Sub County. Large scale cash crop farmers offered jobs to the locals who were paid money at the end of the day. The money paid was used to buy food and household items. Cash crops farming was also a source of income to those practiced the activity. Income from coffee, bananas, cabbages and French beans was used to pay school fees, build houses, start business and buy household goods thereby improving the lives of people. Low food supply was also witnessed which affected the feeding habits of the locals.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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