

The Forgotten Minority: The Origins of the Asian-Owned Sugar Plantation Agriculture in Kisumu County, Kenya

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Abstract: This paper traces the origins and development of Asian sugar plantation agriculture and industry in Kisumu County of Kenya. The sugar plantation economy still remains the cornerstone of the County's economy. The study examines the factors for the emergence of the sugar plantation economy such as the completion of the Uganda railway, colonial land policies and the climatic conditions among others. The study points out that the colonial government in Kenya established and maintained authoritarian labour policies characterized by forced labour, land alienation and taxation. These colonial labour policies gradually induced Africans to join wage labour. Even though the colonial labour policies were mainly aimed at assisting the European settlers, coincidentally the Asian settlers to some extent benefitted too. Material for the study is derived from archival research, oral interviews and analysis of existing works on socio-economic history in general and agriculture in particular. The study is informed by the underdevelopment theory. Using the perspective, the study demonstrates how colonial land and labour policies led to the underdevelopment of peasant sector in Kisumu County. The local people from the surrounding locations tended to work in the nearby Asian sugar plantations because of economic and social reasons and also because the locations were set aside for labour within Kisumu County. Although there was only a limited land alienation for Asian settlement in Kisumu County, its negative effect had become pronounced by the Second World War period. The article contends that colonial capitalism had numerous negative effects on the African peasants in Kisumu County. First, land alienation which was meant to provide land for Asian settlers and to force the local people into wage labour limited the land available to the local people. It concludes that colonialism in its manifold forms intensified the underdevelopment in Kisumu County. The study contributes to the Asian historiography in Kenya. In addition it explores the contribution of African labourers to Asians' agricultural endeavours.

Keywords: Capitalism; labour; plantation; sugar industry; underdevelopment.

INTRODUCTION

The Kenyan sugar industry has been bedevilled with numerous challenges since its inception. Despite being the main cash crop in Kisumu County of Kenya for over fifty years, majority of sugar cane farmers still live in poverty and are unable to make ends meet. Over the years, the sugar industry has largely been run down and it is unable to pay farmers effectively on time for cane deliveries. Moreover, the price of cane has remained dismally low. The cost of sugar production in Nyanza is very high which makes it cheaper to import sugar into the country than to produce it locally hence the emergence of modern "sugar barons" in the country.

What is the way forward for the sugar industry which is the backbone of the economy of much of Western Kenya? What's the future of the sugar industry? This paper provides a historical genesis to the sugar industry to make it possible to understand the challenges and dynamics of the sugar industry in Kenya. The material for this paper is derived from

archival research, oral interviews and analysis of existing works on socio-economic history in general and labour in particular

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

The article is informed by the dependency/underdevelopment perspective. The dependency/underdevelopment perspective was spearheaded by Latin American scholars such as Dos Santos, Baran, Cardoso and Gunder Frank among others in the 1960s [1-3]. It was a reaction to the modernization approach which had attributed the Third World's underdevelopment to internal causes.

Proponents of the dependency perspective have argued that the underdevelopment of the Third World was due to the historical evolution of a highly unequal international capitalist system of poor and rich countries [2]. They point out that the relationship between the developed and underdeveloped countries is one of inequality, characterised by exploitation and economic control of the metropole. Thus, contact with the

metropole does not culminate in the diffusion of advanced technology, but rather leads to intensification of underdevelopment in the peripheries. Furthermore, the perspective postulates that the articulation process between the peripheral and the central economies was characterized by the destruction of the traditional societies and economies through market forces under industrialization. It further contends that the international capitalist system brought a global polarization, where the peripheries became marginalized and remained in perpetual poverty, with the centre developing at their expense.

The underdevelopment approach was popularized in Africa by Walter Rodney and Samir Amin [34]. They point out that colonialism contributed to the exploitation of both natural and human resources of the Third World. For example, Samir Amin notes that wage levels in the periphery were lower compared to wage levels in the metropole. This meant that the labourers in the peripheries subsidised those in the metropole. Palmer and Parsons [35] opines that the capitalist system not only increased economic distortion and subordination of the Africans but also impoverished them. This was achieved through the extraction of wealth from the indigenous modes so as to transform the Africans into cheap migrant labourers.

The Origins of Asian Sugar Plantation Agriculture

The colonial government in Kenya favoured the establishment of white settler plantation economy in the country instead of peasant agriculture. Initially the colonial government officials were not agreed on whether the plantation agriculture should be in the hands of Asians, Jews or European settlers [4-8]. Nevertheless, despite the predominance of European settler agriculture a small number of Asian farmers were granted land in Kisumu County from 1902.

Asian sugar plantations in Kisumu County emerged in the period 1901-18. The government introduced various land and agricultural policies to achieve that objective.

In 1901 the Kenya - Uganda railway line reached its terminus on Lake Victoria, at Kisumu. The railway line was intended to open up the interior of the then British East Africa Protectorate. It became incumbent on the colonial government officials to identify the means of making the railway pay for its construction and maintenance and also to help make the colonial government financially solvent [9]. Since the then British East African Protectorate was deficient in mineral wealth, agriculture was seen as a possible alternative of producing commodities for export [10]. Initially some of the early officials of the Imperial British East African Company, such as John Ainsworth, Harry Johnson and George Mackenzie supported the idea of Asian settlement in the country [4, 5, 10].

In 1901 the then Commissioner of the Protectorate, Sir Charles Eliot, stated that it was his hope that Asian agriculturalists would settle in the country [11]. By 1902 there were 30 European settlers in the Protectorate. They were opposed to the granting of agricultural land to Asians. As such, because of pressure from this small but vocal settler community, Charles Eliot's attitude to Asian settlement changed. He became the architect of white settlement in the country. To attract them to the country Sir Eliot offered European settlers generous terms such as large grants of land free or for nominal purchase fees or very low rents [12, 13]. Consequently, in 1902 he recommended that Asian settlements should be confined to the lowlands. In August, the same year the then acting Commissioner of the Protectorate, Fredrick Jackson, issued a circular offering Asians land along the railway line, albeit outside the Highlands [4, 5, 10, 14].

The colonial government thus only allowed limited Asian agricultural settlements in lowland areas of the country which were considered climatically unsuitable for white settlement [11, 15]. In April 1903, Charles Eliot declared Kibos, 10 Kilometres outside Kisumu town an Asian Settlement Area [4, 10, 15]. It is worth noting that following the completion of the Kenya - Uganda railway line, out of the 32,000 indentured Asian labourers, 6,724 opted to remain in East Africa after the expiry of their contracts [16]. Some of these ex-labourers were willing to settle in the country if the government offered them financial assistance and free passage to enable their families join them [5, 10, 17]. The Indian office had also recommended that instead of recruiting settlers from India, these ex-labourers could be considered for land grants.

Ghai and Ghai [36] have argued that the present Asian population in East Africa cannot be regarded as the descendants of the Asian indentured labourers. His argument is not accurately applicable to the Asian sugar cane planters in Kisumu County. Available evidence shows that the first thirty pioneer Asian settlers in the County were ex-labourers who had been granted land by the Government in the Kibos-Miwani area in 1903. Furthermore, some of the senior Asian railway officials acquired land in the area while still in employment or after retirement [23]. Asian settlers were also offered land grants along the Kenya - Uganda railway line between Kibos and East of Muhoroni [18]. A big percentage of the pioneer Asian settlers were Punjabi, especially Sikhs who were traditionally an agricultural community [4, 17].

According to Mehta [19], there were famines in Punjab province in the early 1900s which stimulated Indian immigration to East Africa. The Asian settlers started occupying their land allotments in the Kibos-

Muhoroni area in 1903. The area was then sparsely populated by local clans, Jokano and Jokajulu because it was a buffer zone between the Luo and the Nandi. However, some Luo families were evicted to give way for the establishment of the Asian plantations. For example, in Kibigori area, five African *bomas* (homesteads) of 23 huts were destroyed [24].

In addition, the Luo who were then occupying land north of the Railway line, West of Kibigori were evicted from their land. The colonial government paid the affected Luo families 810 rupees in total as compensation. Furthermore, 37 African homesteads in Kibos Area, as well as 60 villages in the Miwani Area were demolished to create room for the Asian plantations [20, 9]. Between 1902-12 about 12,000 acres of African land in the Kibos-Muhoroni area had been alienated for the Asian settlements. Initially, land holdings ranged from 50-100 acres.

The majority of the Asian land grantees were Sikhs and a big percentage were related to each other. This is evident from the names. Some of the grantees were allotted several plots in the Area (see Table 1.1). About 60% of the plots were on freehold while the rest were on leaseholds of 99 years. Several plots were owned by two or more partners or by a company. A number of these farmers operated business or other enterprises in Kisumu town and other towns in Kenya. As a result they practised a form of absentee farming. The pioneer Asian settlers cultivated maize, *chiroco* (green grams), cotton, rice, chillies and sugar cane, which later became the main commercial crop from their settlements [4, 9, 16].

Cultivation of sugar cane in the area started in the period 1903 and 1905. The crop was first cultivated by Umar Din in Muhoroni [23]. When the pioneer Asian settlers at Kibos realised that the crop was suitable for the area they took to it in great earnest from 1906.

The European settlers from the outset made a concerted effort to prevent the alienation of agricultural land in the White Highlands for Asians [4, 7, 21]. For example, in 1906 the white settler controlled Land Board recommended that, since only a small area of the country was suitable for white settlement, the colonial government should reserve it for exclusive settlement by whites. Some officials of the Imperial government abetted the white settlers' demands to restrict acquisition of land by Asians in the country. For example, in 1906 Lord Elgin, then British Secretary of State for the colonies declared that land in the Kenya Highlands should not be granted to Asians [4-6, 22]. This statement was popularly referred to as the "Elgin Pledge" and was used by the white settlers and some colonial government officials to deny Asians land in the White Highlands.

The White settlers were opposed to Asian settlement in the White Highlands because of racial prejudice and fear of Asian competition. McGregor Ross [21] observes that the white settlers did not want the Asians to profit from land speculation which was in the offing in Kenya. Furthermore, he points out that the pioneer Asian traders in the country were on the aggregate far much wealthier compared to the pioneer European settlers. Thus, Asians could have out-bidden whites in free purchase of land. The colonial government, therefore, put obstacles on the ownership of land by the Asians. For example, while a European settler could be granted tens of thousands of acres, allotments to Asians were usually limited to 100 acres per grant [4, 5, 21]. Furthermore, whilst Asians were prohibited from acquiring land in the White Highlands, European settlers acquired land in the Miwani-Kibigori-Chemelil area, situated in the lowlands.

From a modest beginning, the Asian agricultural settlements expanded as more Asians acquired land in the Kibos-Muhoroni area [25]. By 1908 about 1,000 acres was already under cultivation. The largest Asian plantation in Kisumu District was owned by a London based Asian company, Messrs Imhazalhi and Sons, which had acquired the Estate in 1910 under the name Kisumu Rubber Estate Limited [26]. The Company had obtained a total of 4,500 acres in Kibos under a generous 96 years' lease. According to the terms of the lease, the Company was to spend £1,652 in development in the first five years.

Besides, the Company was to put into cultivation 165.2 acres during the first year, 330.4 acres in the second year and 495.6 acres in the third year [27]. Thereafter, not less than 495.4 acres was always to be under cultivation of rubber or any other cash crop. The annual rent was 495 rupees. During the first 10 years the company experimented with the cultivation of rubber, but without much success. Thereafter, the Estate was put under Messrs Walji Hirji and sons, of Nairobi who were the company's local agents [27].

Asian farmers developed sugarcane farming through trial and error [24]. This was because the farmers relied mainly on experience from India and were not conversant with the new environment. They experimented with the indigenous sugar cane variety locally known as *Yuba (Uba)* and other varieties which were imported from South Africa, India and Mauritius. Such experiments helped the farmers to identify the cane varieties that could be cultivated on a commercial scale in the area. For example, varieties code -named CO were introduced in Kenya from Coimbatore, a renowned sugar research station in India.

In 1911 the Government established a small sugar experimental farm at Kibos. By 1913 the experimental farm had started issuing sugar cane seeds including the CO varieties to the farmers [24]. The

office of the Nyanza Provincial Director of Agriculture also conducted research on sugar cane mostly on Asian farms and at the "crop museum" in Kisumu town. Plant diseases such as ratoon stunting, mosaic and smut hindered the cane growing experiments. However, plant breeding and cross breeding programmes by individual Asian farmers and at the Government experimental farm contributed to increase in yields from the sugar cane crops.

In 1912 Asian farmers acquired 21 farms of 50 acres each near Muhoroni Township at a government auction in Kisumu town (see Table 1.2). By 1913 there were 70 Asian settlers in the Kibos-Muhoroni area [24]. Before 1923 all the sugar cane produced was used to manufacture jaggery or unrefined sugar [17]. This was because there was no white sugar refinery in the area yet. The farmers used oxen operated crushers to produce jaggery, which was mainly eaten by the local Gujarati. Some was exported (see Table 1.3). However, the total acreage under cultivation was small. For example, by 1916 the area under cultivated cane in Kibos area was 621 acres only [28].

The earliest problem that the Asian farmers encountered was lack of knowledge of local agriculture and farming technology [17, 29]. Thus they experimented with sugar cane, maize, *chiroco* and rice among other crops in an attempt to identify crops that could be cultivated on a large scale and at a profit. Furthermore, the vagaries of the weather affected farming in the area. For example, some parts of the Kibos-Miwani area were prone to droughts and flooding which often destroyed the crops.

In the years 1907 and 1917-18, there were severe droughts, locally known as *Nyangori* and *Kanga*, respectively in the area [27]. Furthermore, during the rainy season, the few roads in the area were impassable. This made it impossible for the farmers to transport produce to the nearby railway stations for marketing. During this early period farm produce was ferried by bullock carts, because motor vehicles were not yet common in the County.

The Asian farmers blamed the colonial government for the poor infrastructure in the area. For example, they complained that the colonial government had not built any access roads beyond a ten kilometre radius from the railway line. Consequently, some of the farmers were marooned in Kisumu town and could not visit their farms for up to three months during the rainy season [23]. This was more so with the part time Asian farmers who at the same time engaged in trade and other businesses in Kisumu town. In 1920 the Asian farmers formed the Kibos Planters Association and the Nyanza Indian Farmers Association.

The two Associations aimed at promoting the agricultural and economic interests of the Asian

farmers. Membership of the former was restricted to the farmers in the Kibos area while the latter had members from all parts of Nyanza where Asian farmers had settled. The two Associations were controlled by Asian traders and professionals who only engaged in farming on part time basis (KNA/DC/KSM/1/3/118)[37]. This was because about 90% of those who were full time farmers were semi-literate. These businessmen and professionals had some of the best managed farms because they had some other reliable sources of income to tide them over unproductive years and to help subsidise their farming.

Examples of such part-time farmers included Dhanwat Singh who was an advocate in Kisumu, Usher Singh, a saw mills owner at Elburgon, and S.S. Satbachan, an ex-inspector of police. Others were Kishen Singh, a medical practitioner in Kisumu, F.L. Mayor, a former senior employee of the Kenya-Uganda Railways, Renmal Mandan, a shopkeeper at Muhoroni, Bhanji Walji and the proprietor of Songhor Stores. In addition there were Hakam Singh, owner of colonial saw mills in Nairobi, V.H. Jobanputra of the Nyanza printing Works and Shamji Harji and Brothers owning hardware and construction businesses in Kisumu town among other farmers. In comparison to the part-time farmers, the Asians who depended entirely on farming found it difficult to make their agricultural enterprises economically viable.

The 1915 Crown Lands Ordinance sealed the fate of Asian land ownership in the White Highlands [4, 5]. Under the Ordinance, the Governor of the then British East Africa Protectorate was empowered to veto any land transaction involving people from non-white racial backgrounds [10]. The aim of the Ordinance was to forestall any possible sale of European owned land in the Highlands to Asians. The European wanted to keep off other races from the Highlands. Such legal restrictions against land ownership by Asians in the most fertile areas of the country meant that Asian involvement in agricultural undertakings was constrained.

Some European settlers had also been granted land in the Miwani-Muhoroni area. Their number increased after the First World War when more European settlers acquired land in the area under the Ex-Soldiers Settlement Scheme (KNA/DC/CN/1/51; KDAQ, 1909-1918)[38]. These European settlers included: James Maxwell, the British East African Corporation, Eric Mayers, P.R. Ryall, J. B. Anderson, P.W. Savage, W. Maxwell, Andrew and Partners, T.R.L. Nestor, and R-O. Ney. Thus Swainson's [22] contention that Asians were granted land in an area where there were no European settlers is erroneous. Before the Second World War the largest sugar plantations and sugar mills in the area were owned by European settlers. These European settlers cultivated both sugar cane and sisal.

Table 1.1 Asian Land Grantees in Muhoroni Indian Settlement, August, 1912

| Farm No | Grantee's Name | Acreage |
|---------|---------------------|-----------------|
| 1. | Falen Chand | 50.00 |
| 2. | Allidina Visram | 51.60 |
| 3. | Hasham Jamal & Co. | 48.10 |
| 4. | Hussein Abdul Rasul | 51.30 |
| 5. | Rasid Khamis | 55.00 |
| 6. | Mohammed Bux | 50.00 |
| 7. | Mohammed Majid | 52.20 |
| 8. | Alibhai Kassim | 50.00 |
| 9. | Mohammed Kassim | 51.20 |
| 10. | Sheik Noor Din | 50.00 |
| 11. | K.M. Bhoghoita Bros | 50.00 |
| 12. | Moladad Dolatakla | 48.70 |
| 13. | Aua Dan | 51.30 |
| 14. | Sultani Raki | 50.00 |
| 15. | Abdul Wahid | 51.30 |
| 16. | Gulam Mohamed | 50.00 |
| 17. | Jalad Din | 52.10 |
| | Total | 1,000.00 |

Source: KNA Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1913

Table 1.2: Asian Land Grantees and Acreage held at Kibos Indian Settlement, 1913

| Plot No | Plot name | Acreage |
|---------|--------------------------------------|--------------------|
| | Kharka Ram & Labu Ram | 100.00 |
| | Vali Hasham & Co. | 50.00 |
| | Chowdi Ram Jowaya | 25.00 |
| | Mokanjee | 50.00 |
| | George Mathews | 103.00 |
| | Jagat Singh and Surean Singh | 95.00 |
| | Gujar Ram, Malawa Ram Prabdial & Co. | 85.20 |
| | Harriram Prabdial & Co. | 100.00 |
| | Veharibhai C. Patel | 100.00 |
| | Pala Singh | 30.80 |
| | Jagat Singh & Surean Singh | 88.20 |
| | A.A. Visram | 50.00 |
| | A. Jan Mohamed Guga | 50.00 |
| | Malawa Ram Prabdial | 24.50 |
| | Gulam Moyud Din | 50.00 |
| | Mohamed Din Ali Jawaya | 25.00 |
| | Gujai Ram | 50.00 |
| | ----- | - |
| | Abdul Majid & Ghetu | 100.00 |
| | Dewa Singh & Sodagar | 76.00 |
| | Kharka Ram & Labu Ram | 7.00 |
| | Kaloo Ram | 14.40 |
| | Bhai Dan Devi | 77.00 |
| | Kalooram | 12.00 |
| | Kalooram | 36.40 |
| | Jamna Das Karams | 54.40 |
| | Gurma Singh & Buta Singh | 50.00 |
| | Gobid Ram & Kaloo Ram | 50.00 |
| | Jagat Singh & Surean Singh | 44.00 |
| | Inder Singh Munshi Ram | 50.00 |
| | Ladha Ram | 50.00 |
| | Sandhu Singh | 50.00 |
| | Malawa Ram Prabdial | 50.00 |
| | Jagat Singh & Surean Singh | 14.60 |
| | Total | 1,700 acres |

Source: KNA Nyanza Province Annual Report 1913

Table 1.3 Jaggery Export from Asian Sugar Plantations in Kisumu District in Tons, 1909-18

| 1909 | 1910 | 1911 | 1912 | 1913 | 1914 | 1915 | 1916 | 1917 | 1918 |
|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| 25 | 46 | 21 | 66 | 19 | 29 | 17 | 109 | 116 | 117 |

Source: Fearn, *An African Economy: A Study of the Economic Development of the Nyanza Province of Kenya, 1903-1953*, London: Oxford University Press, 1961, 79.

In sum, by the end of the First world War the Asian sugar plantations were still in infancy. The acreage under cultivation was small compared to later years. Thus the farmers were still striving to put their agricultural undertakings on a firm footing.

Colonial Labour Policies and Labour Supply in the Asian Sugar Plantations

Wage labour in Kenya, to a large extent was a colonial creation. The colonial government introduced labour policies which aimed at facilitating a supply of cheap African labour especially for the European settlers. Following the imposition of colonial rule in Kenya a massive supply of African labour was required by both the government and the settlers to lay the foundation of the colonial economy. However, undercapitalised as the Colonial State and the settlers were during the period before First World War, they could not provide attractive wages and working conditions that could induce and retain labour [13]. As a result, the number of Africans entering into wage labour was inadequate and could not meet the continuous demand by both the public and private employers.

The poor response by Africans to wage labour was partly because of self sufficiency of their traditional economies. Consequently, many of them did not see the need to seek wage employment. Moreover, the Africans had very few wants which their economies could not meet. Moreover, the Asian merchandise and cash economy had not yet taken deep root in Kisumu County before the 1920s [17]. The Asian settlers required African labour to work in their agricultural enterprises. Just as was the case with the European settlers, the labour problem of Asian settlers was three fold: they wanted to obtain enough labourers, retain them in employment and ensure that they worked productively [17].

The Asian farmers relied to a large extent on casual labourers from the nearby African locations of Kano and Kajulu. At the outset, because of lack of mechanization, the work of clearing the forests and establishing the farms had to be done manually. This necessitated the employment of African labour. Before the 1940s those Africans willing to engage in wage labour preferred to work near their homes because of social and economic obligations [9, 30]. This enabled them to attend to their own farms and livestock more closely.

The Employment of Servants Ordinance of 1910 defined short term or casual labourer as adult labour engaged on daily or monthly basis, 30 day tickets or 90 day contracts (KNA /DC/KSM/17/16)[39]. Casual labour was advantageous to the labourers in several ways. First, it made it possible to combine wage labour with peasant agricultural work. Secondly, it enabled the labourers to remain within their home area so that they were able to fulfil their cultural and other societal obligations more easily. And lastly, it was a source of income for labourers who had no other means of earning a livelihood but who did not want to be tied to a particular employer. The major disadvantage of the casual labour system to the employer was that it was characterized by low daily turnout since the labourers were not under full control of the employer. This made it necessary for the employer to engage double the number of labourers required [17].

Men, women, as well as juveniles were engaged as daily paid casual labourers in the Asian sugar plantations (KNA /DC/KSM/17/16)[39]. Women and juveniles from the nearby locations were mainly engaged in planting cane and weeding. On the other hand, men were deployed in weeding, cane cutting and loading cane onto trolleys and trucks as well as in the jaggery manufacturing plants. The daily paid casual labourers mainly came from the nearby locations of Kajulu, Kano and to some extent Nyakach. A few Nandi were also employed as casual labourers.

The colonial government introduced the policy of land alienation, and the creation of small African Reserves in Kenya. This, it was hoped would help force Africans to seek wage labour in the plantations and towns. It's worth noting that these African Reserves were supposed to act as labour reservoirs to serve the needs of the settlers and the colonial government. As one European farmer bluntly put it: "...from the farmer's point of view, the ideal reserve is a recruiting ground for labour, a place from which the able bodied go out to work, returning occasionally to rest and beget the next generation of labourers" [31].

Taxation was one of the direct mechanisms adopted by the colonial government to induce the Africans to enter wage labour. It was first introduced in Nyanza in 1900 in the form of a hut tax of one rupee per hut annually [32]. It was officially gazetted in 1901. Initially taxation could be paid in kind and its aim was to raise revenue to meet the cost of administration. However, taxation was later seen as a good inducement

for Africans' joining wage labour. The system imposed an economic burden on the Africans, some of whom sought wage labour to obtain cash for the tax. In 1903 the hut tax was increased to three rupees per hut per annum [21, 30].

The tax was to be paid by all adult married males. Failure to meet tax obligations could result in heavy punishment in the form of burning down of the defaulter's hut and granaries or imprisonment [13]. Such a punishment was meted out by the local African chiefs and headmen on behalf of the colonial government. In spite of this, it is worth noting that prior to the First World War, taxation mainly compelled the poorer section of the Africans to enter into wage labour. This was because some Africans could obtain cash through the sale of surplus agricultural produce or trade [30].

In 1906 the colonial government introduced a 30-day ticket system of work [32]. According to this system, at the end of each day the ticket was marked to indicate whether the labourer had performed his or her daily task or not. Payment was only made at the completion of 30 working days, and was based on the record on the work ticket. The system was very unpopular with African labourers because it was prone to misuse and abuse by the employer. For example, some employers deliberately failed to mark the ticket even when the labourer had performed his or her task. Sometimes the employer claimed that the work had not been satisfactorily carried out, and refused to mark the ticket. Furthermore, some employers tended to dismiss their labourers before the completion of the 30 days. Thus such labourers ended up losing the wages for the days they had already worked. The ticket system was in use in some of the Asian sugar plantations by 1910 [17].

Before 1908 the colonial government allowed the local chiefs, and headmen to recruit labour for both public and private enterprises. A chief's efficiency and efficacy was often judged from the number of labourers he recruited. Some chiefs therefore, became overzealous and predatory in their work. Such chiefs were ready to use all means at their disposal including force to coerce out labourers [26]. Chiefs thus became predators rather than protectors of their people. In 1908 this policy was discontinued by order of the Colonial Secretary and replaced with that of "encouragement".

According to the policy of "encouragement", the local administrators were only to advise the private labour recruiters on where to obtain labour. Chiefs and headmen were not to take any part in direct labour recruitment. However, this policy was not always adhered to because the local chiefs and headmen did not see any difference between the two policies [30]. This means that, whenever the local chiefs and headmen received labour recruiters in their stations they thought

it was their duty to ensure that they obtained labour for the recruiters.

In 1912 the colonial government appointed a Labour Commission to investigate and report on the issue of labour demands and supply in the colony. African witnesses who appeared before this Commission complained that chiefs and headmen had put pressure on them to enter the wage labour [21]. It was also claimed that some of the chiefs were corrupt and exempted from labour conscription people who bribed them.

According to oral information the first colonial Chief of Kajulu, Se Oriti Kamidigo had good relations with the pioneer Asian settlers in Kibos [17]. Thus he encouraged his people to seek wage labour in the Asian plantations. Chief Owiti Kitoto (1905-1912) of Kano is also reported to have assisted both the European and Asian settlers in the District to obtain labour. Following the ban on official labour recruitment in 1908, there emerged professional labour recruiters, both European and Asian in Nyanza Province (KNA/NPAR/1903-1908)[40]. The Masters and Servants Ordinance No.4 of 1910 defined a Labour Agent as, anybody who by himself or through an agent or messenger recruited labourers for other employers [28]. It, however, did not apply to anybody who recruited labour for his own personal use. At the same time it did not apply to a messenger or a servant who procured labourers for his master's personal use.

Professional labour agents worked on commission for any employer while a private recruiter was paid salary or fees based on the number of labourers he obtained for the employer. A professional labour recruiter had to obtain a licence valid for twelve months from the District Commissioner. In the same year the colonial government introduced a new tax, the poll tax of three rupees per year for every adult male aged 16 years and above [30]. The tax was first applied to the then labour supplying areas, such as Nyanza Province, with the aim of stimulating labour supply. As Governor Belfield categorically stated in 1913: "We consider that taxation is the only possible method of compelling the native to leave his reserve for the purpose of seeking work ... only in this way can the cost of living be increased for the native" [32].

The Kisumu District Annual Reports of 1908-18 show that local people sought wage employment in the Asian sugar plantations during the tax collection periods, in the months of September to March than during the other months (KNA /KDAQR/1908-1918)[41]. As such, there was a correlation between taxation and wage labour. In 1912 there were approximately 700 labourers in the Kibos-Muhoroni farms on 30-day monthly contracts, at the wage rates of

three to four rupees per ticket without food rations (KNA /KDAQ/1908-1919)[42].

According to oral information such wage rates were low because in some cases a labourer was expected to earn enough money to pay tax for as many as three relatives. In addition, the labourer often purchased commodities such as salt, paraffin, clothes, blankets, seeds, farming tools as well as some food stuff. Certainly the wage rates of three to four rupees were not enough to meet all their needs. In that year, labour shortage was experienced in the County due to over recruitment of labourers for the Magadi railway then under construction (KNA /KDAQ/1908-1918)[41]. Therefore, the Kisumu District Commissioner asked chief Owiti Kitoto of Kano to supply labourers for the European and Asian settlers in the District (*ibid.*). The Africans preferred to engage in employment during the off peak agricultural season such as December-February and June-August (*ibid.*).

African labour could be engaged through Labour Agency or personally by the employer. However, before the outbreak of the First World War most Africans were unwilling to engage for more than three months. Clayton and Savage [32] as well as Harlow, Chilver and Smith [31] have noted that the unskilled labour wages were not at par with the cost of living since the wages were low in comparison to the prices of consumer goods and taxation. Asian farmers tended to engage labourers at a rate lower than other employers. For example, in 1910, the wage rates in the Asian farms were three to five rupees per ticket while in 1916 the rates were four to six rupees per ticket [27]. The European settlers on the other hand were offering wage rates of six to seven rupees in 1910 and eight to ten rupees in 1916.

Before the 1920s the Asian farmers did not rely on private labour recruitment. This was because their labour demands were limited since only 620 acres was under sugar cane by 1916. Thus they depended on daily paid casual labourers from the nearby African locations. Furthermore, in the period 1917-22 professional labour recruiters were not allowed to operate in Nyakach and Kano locations [33]. But they operated in the other locations in Kisumu County and were permitted to recruit labour for employers outside the County.

The two locations were set aside by the government to provide labourers solely for the plantations within the County. This decision was beneficial to the Asian farmers because it saved them from stiff competition for labour with employers from outside the County. Thus Africans in the two locations who wanted to engage in wage labour tended to go to the sugar plantations in the Kibos-Muhoroni area. Stichter [30] has shown that by 1915 about 30% of the Luo people around Kisumu had entered the wage labour

market. This was because of the cooperation of the local African chiefs, as well as the proximity of the area to the work places in the plantations and in Kisumu town.

However, it should be noted that before 1914 most of the African labourers were only willing to engage as daily paid casuals or on 30 day contracts but not on longer contracts. This was because, they tended to join the wage labour only to obtain cash to meet specific needs such as the purchase of the newly introduced English hoes (*jembe*), and consumer goods or to pay tax. For example, between 1913-14, about 30,000 hoes, in addition to a large number of clothes, were bought by the Africans in the District [24].

According to oral information, Asian sugar cane farmers periodically faced labour shortage especially before the First World War. John Ainsworth, the then Provincial Commissioner for Nyanza Province in the period 1906-1918 (Lonsdale, 1964)[44] pointed out that, the labour shortage in the plantations was a result of poor working conditions (*The Leader*, 1916)[45] such as poor rations, cruelty, poor housing and long hours of work, which were evident in the Asian plantations. Thus Ainsworth was of the opinion that the labour shortage problem could be solved if the employers offered higher wages and better conditions.

During the First World War of 1914-18, the supply of labour to the Asian plantations improved greatly [17]. This was the result of the 1915-19 recruitment for the carrier corps which was unpopular with the Africans, who wanted to avoid it through wage labour. Thus to a great extent the supply of labour exceeded demand. The Africans were willing to engage on longer contracts than before. As Stichter [30] points out, prior to the outbreak of the War Africans tended to work on contracts of three months while in 1918 the labourers were willing to engage in contracts of six to eight months. Africans who were engaged in wage labour were exempted from military conscription in the reserves. Because of the fear for recruitment into the carrier corps many Luo men preferred to enter wage labour hence the long labour contracts.

In 1917-18 there was a serious drought in the County which caused a famine locally known as *Kanga* (KNA/KDAQ/1918-1919)[42]. The famine greatly affected Kano and Nyakach locations. Annual reports of that period show that the people of the two locations were forced to look for food from the neighbouring Districts of Kericho, Nandi and North Kavirondo. Some of them sought wage employment in the Asian plantations to obtain cash to buy food. For example, the 1918 and 1919 Kisumu District Annual reports show that approximately 200-300 families from the Ramogi clan in Nyakach location migrated to the Muhoroni area either as squatters or wage labourers (KNA/KDAQ/1918-1919)[42].

On the whole, during the 1901-18 period wage labour in the Asian sugar plantations did not adversely affect production in the African economy. This was because the plantations employed only a small number of labourers, ranging from 600 to 800 annually. Furthermore, the majority of these labourers only engaged on short term contracts and were able to continue with their traditional roles in the society, such as clearing forests in readiness for cultivation, tending livestock, fishing and other tasks.

CONCLUSION

This article has focused on the factors that facilitated the emergence of Asian sugar plantations in Kisumu District to 1918. It has been pointed out that these factors included colonial land policies which led to the alienation of African land in the Kibos-Muhoroni area for Asian settlement. The colonial government adopted land policies which to some extent did not favour Asian agricultural enterprises. Such inimical policies included the prohibition of ownership of land by Asians in the White Highlands. However, Asians were ultimately allowed to own land in the lowlands. Although the Asian Sugar Plantations were still in their nascent stage, by 1918 they had begun to produce jaggery, some of which was exported to England. They were also producing maize, green grams, rice and cotton.

The colonial government established and maintained authoritarian labour policies characterized by forced labour, land alienation and taxation. These colonial labour policies gradually induced Africans to join wage labour in the Asian Sugar Plantations and elsewhere. Even though the colonial labour policies were mainly aimed at assisting the European settlers, coincidentally the Asian Settlers to some extent benefitted too. The local people from Kano and Kajulu locations tended to work in the nearby Asian Sugar plantations because of economic and social reasons and also because the locations were set aside for labour within Kisumu County. Nearly all the labourers were at first engaged on daily paid basis or on 30 day verbal contracts. This made it possible for them to oscillate between wage labour and the peasant economy. However, the number of labourers during the 1901-18 period was small and this means that by 1918 the African rural economic sector was hardly affected by African participation in wage labour.

The African labourers in the sugar plantations were exploited by the Asian farmers. This was manifested in low wages, poor working conditions and arduous tasks. The colonial state facilitated the development of capitalist mode of production in Kisumu County. This role of the Colonial State was evident in the political coercion which marked the emergence of both commodity production and the system of migrant labour in the County. On the whole

the study asserts that the colonial state's policies on land, labour, taxation and public expenditure among others intensified the underdevelopment of Kisumu County.

The Asian farmers employed African labourers to work on their farms. Although there was only a limited land alienation for Asian settlement in Kisumu County, its effect became pronounced in the 1950s. The alienated land especially in the sugarbelt area of Kibos-Miwani area was the most fertile. This alienation meant that the local people, especially Jokajulu were deprived of an area that could have served them as an expansion ground for increased African population. As such, the population increase in Kajulu as well as the hostile climatic conditions meant that the local people had no alternative but to seek wage labour in the nearby Asian plantations and in Kisumu town.

The article contends that colonial capitalism had numerous negative effects on the African peasants in Kisumu County. First, land alienation which was meant to provide land for Asian settlers and to force the local people into wage labour limited the land available to the Africans, especially Jokajulu and Jokano. Secondly, the introduction of taxation as a means of raising revenue for the state and coercing Africans into wage labour brought about monetisation of the local economy. This stimulated commodity production to some extent as individuals sought to escape proletarianisation by accumulating wealth. At the same time a large number of peasants became migrant labourers in the nearby settler plantations.

This study therefore concludes that colonialism in its manifold forms intensified the underdevelopment in Kisumu County. For instance, colonial land policies undermined the local people's economy while extraction of surplus through taxation weakened the social basis of production. Thus commodity production and labour migration partially destroyed the domestic system of production. The Asian sugar plantation economy would not have developed without the government land and labour policies which favoured it to some extent.

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