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R U R A L H O U S I N G C O N D I T I O N S I N

K W A L E D I S T R I C T , K E N Y A

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CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF KWALE DISTRICT

1.1 Physical Environment

Kwale District, one of the six districts constituting Coast Province, is situated along the Indian Ocean in the farmost south-eastern corner of Kenya. According to the 1979 population census, the district covers a total of 7.962 square kilometres (Republic of Kenya, 1981). There are three main topographical zones running north-south: the Coastal Plain; the Coastal Uplands and the Nyika Plateau. The Coastal Plain is a relatively narrow belt of maximum 10 km wide which has an altitude of up to 30 metres above sea level. The Nyika Plateau with its gently rolling relief, has an altitude which ranges between 150 and 300 metres. Wedged in between these two zones, the Coastal Uplands with a width of 10 to 20 km, have an altitude varying from 150 to 460 metres. This area also includes a number of hill complexes (Shimba Hills: 420 m) and isolated hills (Simba: 320 m; Kiwara: 323 m and Mount Jombo: 462 m).

The district has a monsoon type of climate which is hot and dry from January to March/April. The rainfall is bi-modal with the long rains usually starting in March/April and continuing until July. The short rains are concentrated in October and November and a short and relatively unimportant intermediate rain period occurs in August/September. Usually, the timing and duration of the long rains are more reliable than those of the short rains. The short rains tend to be more pronounced in the hinterland zone than on the coast. The annual maximum temperatures range from about 26 and 30 °C on the coast to 30 and 40 °C in the hinterland plateau. The vicinity to the Indian Ocean results in high rates of humidity, especially in the Coastal Plain. The part of Kwale District situated west of the Coastal Uplands has a relatively dry climate. Rainfall patterns in Kwale are typical for the zonation which exists in Coast Province as a whole. A zone of some 30 to 35 km from the coast receives over 800 mm annually. This relatively high