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UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI
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A PRELIMINARY REPORT ABOUT RURAL HOUSING
CONDITIONS IN KISII DISTRICT.

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1. INTRODUCTION

It is now widely accepted that housing conditions in Third World countries are poor. The concern about the situation became clear from the international conference on Human Settlements held under the auspices of the United Nations at Vancouver in 1976.

Good housing conditions are nowadays acknowledged as one of the basic needs of the population of any country. Governments of most Third World countries have adopted clearer and more detailed policies to improve existing housing conditions. Usually such policies show an urban bias for a number of reasons among which one may mention the seemingly better situation in the rural areas as compared with the urban slums, the growth-oriented development policy with one-sided attention for so-called modern production activities and the disproportional political influence of urban-based segments of the population.

The idea of the seemingly better housing conditions in the rural areas is also heavily influenced by the lack of knowledge about rural housing conditions. If information is available to policy makers, it usually concerns description of traditional architecture which presents a picture of idealized past harmony and inventiveness. Without denying the value of long existing building techniques and local materials, one must nevertheless realise that rural housing conditions in Third World countries have changed under external influences, the commercialisation of agriculture in particular, while, moreover, a much wider differentiation of housing conditions for various segments of the population has become apparent. This lack of knowledge about present rural housing conditions in relation to recent processes of socio-economic change also applies to Kenya.

Because of this, the Housing Research and Development Unit of the University of Nairobi and the Department of Geography of Developing Countries, University of Utrecht together with the Technical University of Delft decided to cooperate in a research programme on rural housing conditions. The objective of the research has been phrased as follows:-

to provide insight into the spatial differentiation of the present state of housing conditions in the rural parts of Kenya, to identify the factors influencing the housing conditions, and to make suggestions for improvement in accordance with the preferences of the local population.

The present research is carried out in the Kisii District of Nyanza Province. The application of the objective to the Kisii District implies that attention has to be paid to the following aspects:-

- the characteristics of the present housing conditions
- the identification of factors responsible for the present housing conditions.
- the extent to which the local population is satisfied with the present housing conditions.
- the characteristics of the central and local government's policy in relation to local demands for improvement.
- the possibilities for alternative improvement programmes.

This preliminary report deals with the general aspects of rural housing conditions in Kisii District at the macro-level against the background of the district's economy. It subsequently contains the plan of the more detailed research into rural housing conditions at the micro or sub-location level.