
THE KENYA COAST: A REGIONAL STUDY

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The East African Coast extends from the Horn of Africa to halfway down Mozambique; an approximate distance of 3000 km. The semi-desert in Somalia is followed by forests, coconut groves, scrub lands and grasslands interspersed by the estuaries of the large rivers reaching the Indian Ocean. In many ways the Kenya Coast resembles the rest of the East African Coast more so than the interior of Kenya with its extended savannahs and mountain ranges.

The Kenya Coast is situated immediately south of the equator; it covers a distance by air of some 450 km while the actual length of the sea front is around 600 km. In the far south there are extensive mangroves and coral reefs with near-shore islands. Mombasa Island straddles a creek system with natural harbours on both sides. Rugged coast follows northwards with the deep water creeks of Mtwapa and Kilifi and the shallow Mida creek. The reef ends at Malindi which is halfway up the coast. Along Ungwana Bay, landscape and habitation of the Northern Coast change profoundly. The beaches are long and sandy, open to the sea with rolling breakers; the narrow coastal plain widens and extends far inland (Hoorweg 1998). The land is sparsely inhabited. It consists of dunes and scrub vegetation, interrupted by the Tana River delta with wetlands and mangroves and the limestone cliffs of Ras Shaka

(Frazier, 1993). Far north, in the Lamu archipelago, the coastline consists again of near-shore islands, bays, creeks and large mangrove forests.

The definition of the Kenya Coast as used in this monograph includes seven districts, Taita Taveta, Kwale, Mombasa, Kilifi, Malindi, Lamu and the lower part of Tana River District (Figure 1.1, p. 4).¹ This region covers an area of roughly 150 by 450 km and accounts for more than 2 million people or about 10% of the national population.

The Kenya Coast forms a distinct region of the country. A region is generally defined as "a sub-national division of space, delimited in terms of one or more criteria" (Simon 1990a: xv). Such criteria can be of several kinds: physical delineation, population distribution, economic activities, political divisions and socio-cultural characteristics (Sada 1993). The Kenya Coast meets several of these criteria and is a distinct region in this geographical sense. Distance and climate are important factors: the region is divided from the rest of the country by an extended and dry zone, the Taru desert. The tropical monsoon climate is different from the rest of the country with

¹ This definition differs from that of Coast Province as administrative unit since it includes small parts of Eastern and North-Eastern Province while it excludes the rest of Tana River District.

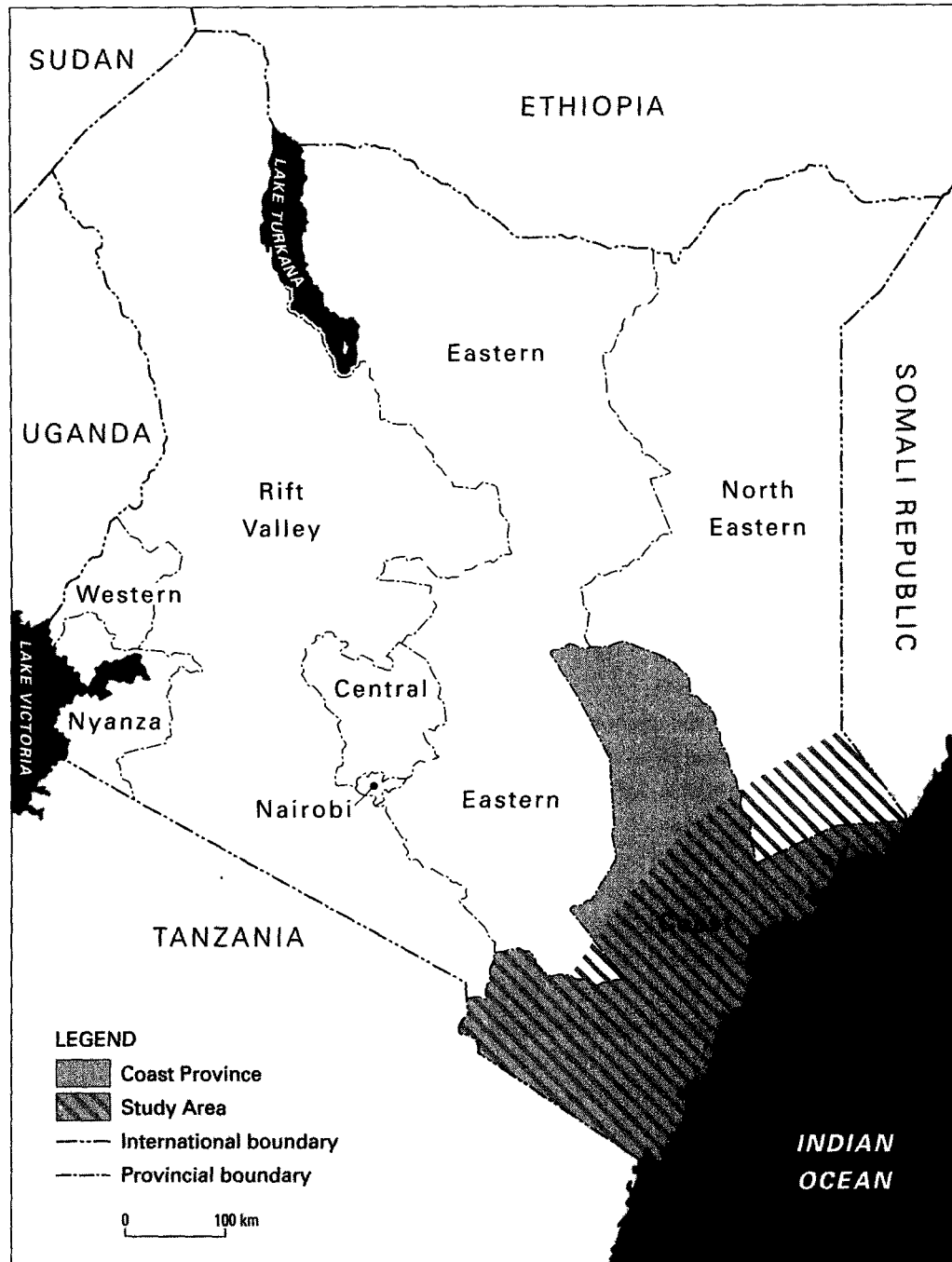


Figure 1.1 Coast Province and study area

the *kazkazi* and *kusi* seasons (North-East and South-East monsoon, respectively). In terms of historical and social developments, the area is also distinct despite great internal divisions.

For many centuries, the coastal region was the most economically developed part of what now constitutes Kenya. This was a trading economy, the coastal centres serving as trading links between the immediate hinterland and various trading destinations. The overseas *dhow* trade covered the East African Coast as well as the Middle East and present-day India. Many small trading centres flourished along the coast of which Lamu, Malindi and Mombasa are best known. Mombasa ultimately developed into the main port; it has the best natural harbour of Kenya, probably the best of the whole East African Coast.

With the start of colonial administration in 1895, little changed at first. Mombasa served as headquarters of the British East Africa Protectorate (Ndua 1992). In 1901 the railway from Mombasa reached Lake Victoria. A few years later, Nairobi became the capital, situated inland which is quite unusual for African coastal states. Subsequently, development efforts by the colonial government concentrated increasingly on the areas with white settlers in the interior. The importance of the Kenya Coast was narrowed to that of Mombasa as a transit point for persons and goods. Broadly speaking, the relative neglect of the Coast continued to present days. Hence, despite the apparent wealth along the beaches and the presence of Kenya's major port in Mombasa, the Coast finds itself in a comparatively disadvantaged position compared to central Kenya.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

During the 1960s, regional development and development in general were more or less equated with economic development. Friedmann (1964), for instance, defined regional development simply as

economic growth with a spatial perspective. At present, development and regional development have a much broader meaning, "a multifaceted process whereby the quality of life and 'personality' of individuals and groups improves" (Simon 1990a: xiv). In other words, development differs from mere economic growth (Omuta & Onokerhoraye 1986). Recently, the element of control and management of resources has come to be included. In 1995, UNDP defined (human) development as the broadening of the options that people have in order to improve their livelihoods and determine their future. Four years later, human development had simply become "the process of enlarging people's choices" (UNDP 1999: 16). Development then embraces all social, cultural, economic and political aspects of life, quantitative as well as qualitative in nature.

Regional development concerns physical, infrastructural as well as human resources. Early on, physical resources were seen as the main determinants of development – factors such as geology, land forms, soils, climate, hydrology, vegetation and fauna. Infrastructural resources include energy, water, transport and communications as well as factors such as housing and distribution networks. Over time, human resources have come to be considered essential; the key variable in this respect is what is called the quality of the labour force. The latter depends not only on educational and occupational skills, but also on elements such as social customs, the influence of climate on human comfort and energy, diet and nutrition, as well as health (Omuta & Onokerhoraye 1986).

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

Two main approaches to regional development have come to be recognised, essentially the difference between centralised and decentralised strategies, conveniently labelled as 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' approaches (Obudho 1988; Simon 1990b; Simon

1992).

During the 1960s, the growth centre or growth pole theory was widely accepted as the basis for regional planning in less developed countries. An activated expansion of certain industrial sectors in selected urban centres would stimulate development in the surrounding hinterlands. The positive spread effects were expected to outweigh the negative 'backwash' effects such as the destruction of local industries and the ensuing loss of employment. However, the results of this planning model, by and large, have been disappointing (Bloch 1990; Simon 1990b). In many cases, the growth centres became or remained 'islands' in impoverished environs. Recent top-down strategies tend to aim at curbing the growth of the large metropolises and instead focus on the development of small and intermediate centres. An example is Kenya's development centre policy (Nyakaana 1995; Obudho 1988).

One of the major complaints against the growth pole strategy was that the poorer groups were not given special attention (Van der Hoeven 1987). As a reaction, the so-called basic needs policy was developed. "Development 'from below' considers development to be based primarily on maximum mobilisation of each area's natural, human, and institutional resources" (Stöhr & Taylor 1981: 1-2). The objective is to provide the poor with basic needs, i.e., the minimum levels of nutrition, safe drinking water, shelter, hygiene, health care and literacy, amongst others, with the ultimate aim for the poor not just to survive but to improve their living situation (Simon 1990b). A 'strong' basic needs policy requires that the poor be central or, in other words, that the poor must be empowered. This implies fundamental changes in the division of power in the society. At the same time, this is the reason that true basic needs strategies are not likely to succeed or that they will remain top-down strategies in part (Simon 1990b).

The 1970s saw a shift in attention towards the rural areas and witnessed the rise of integrated rural development programmes. Many of these programmes proved to be only partially successful and one of the major objectives, self-sustainability, was hardly ever reached. Consequently, in the 1980s the emphasis shifted to "the interdependence and symbiosis of the rural *and* urban" (Baker & Pedersen 1992: 12). The growth of small urban centres is seen as a necessary condition for rural transformation (Baker & Claeson 1990).

KENYA AND THE KENYA COAST

Regional development planning in Kenya reflects the above described changes. The 1970s indeed saw a shift from development concentrated in Nairobi and Mombasa, to 'selective concentration' on nine intermediate urban centres. Nakuru, Kisumu, Thika, Eldoret and others were designated as (industrial) growth centres (Nyakaana 1995). During the 1980s, planning focus shifted further to achieve a so-called 'rural-urban balance'. Small and intermediate centres were expected to "(...) relieve the population pressure in the countryside, provide less congested and populated urban living in the primate city, (...) increase the modernisation spin-off which urban centres provide to the surrounding rural areas, and provide a better integration with the economy of the rural hinterland" (Obudho, Akatch & Aduwo 1988: 165).

Concurrently, the District Focus Policy for Rural Development was launched in 1983. The objectives of this policy were threefold, namely to delegate the operational responsibility of rural development to the districts, to increase productivity and effectiveness in the development process, and to encourage local development efforts (Obudho *et al.* 1988). The District Focus Policy entails a hierarchy of development committees at respective levels of district administration. These committees discuss ongoing

development activities and new initiatives. Plans pass through each committee and each level of administration sets priorities that are passed on to the next. The District Development Committee takes a central position and has decision-making power. Although the policy indeed manages to realise grass-roots participation, the procedures are cumbersome and it takes long for an initiative to pass through the system (Grootuis 1999). At present, 'rural-urban balance' is regarded as the main objective of regional development policy. With this strategy, the government attempts to implement a combination of a top-down and a bottom-up approach with the aim to overcome the weaknesses of the respective approaches (Fair 1990).

The Kenya Coast is a pronounced example of the growth pole model of regional development. Apart from Mombasa, no 'intermediate urban centres' have been designated. There has not been any concerted effort or planning for the development of this part of the country by successive governments. Since Independence the centre has been dominated by up-country groups and there has been an under-representation of ministerial positions given to coastal representatives. Not surprisingly, the Coast has also taken a relatively marginal position in respect to the distribution of investments and services as the different chapters will make clear, although the picture is often complex.

It is generally accepted that the coastal region suffers from a chronic lack of development. Some writers are of the view that "the Coast has moved to a marginal position" and that "the Coast appears the most deprived region"² but at closer examination indicators are equivocal and this will be an important subject of discussion. Development projects, past and ongoing, have usually been of a limited scale although some have not been without success as later

chapters will show.

MONOGRAPH SET-UP

This monograph has two objectives. Firstly, it is a study of a distinct region that is important in its own right. Secondly, it covers the main trends and efforts at development of the region. The emphasis is on information for the general reader as well as information for development workers, government officers and planners, students and researchers.

Part I of the book consists of this introductory chapter and Chapter 2, which gives a short overview of the development of the region in a national context. *Meilink (2)*³ shows that coastal development, both economically and socially, went hand in hand with increasing regional inequalities.

Part II covers the general background. The physical characteristics and the existing infrastructure are reviewed by *Foeken (3)*. The main part of the region is relatively dry, with a high variation in amount of rainfall. The Coast has the highest percentage of low-potential land of the country, with the exception of North Eastern Province. The wetter parts along the coastline are densely populated and are more developed in terms of infrastructure. A separate chapter is devoted to marine resources. *Aloo (4)* describes the highly productive ecosystems of the coastal zone that are important as a source of food, building materials, employment and (foreign) earnings in the form of tourism. The chapter by *Tole (5)* is concerned with environmental problems. Many of these are specific to the Coast, particularly those affecting the reefs, sea shores and mangroves as well as those associated with beach tourism. *Wakajumab (6)* describes the population dynamics in terms of birth rates, mortality and migration characteristics. There is a youthful age structure, an elongated population distribution following the coastline,

² These citations are given by Meilink, Chapter 2, p.12 and are from Geist and Livingstone, respectively.

³ Cross-references to other chapters are given by name of author and chapter number, both in italics.

and in ethnic terms the province is the most heterogeneous of Kenya. The review by *Obudho (7)* describes how urbanisation in the region is concentrated almost exclusively in Mombasa. This mono-directed character has resulted in problems of unemployment, lack of infrastructural facilities and environmental hazards.

Part III offers an historical background with emphasis on political and socio-cultural developments. *Middleton (8)* in his chapter on the peoples of the region describes the respective Bantu speaking groups as well as the largely forgotten Cushite minorities. He gives most attention to the Swahili who for a long time had a dominant role in commercial, political, cultural and social aspects. *Cooper (9)* treats the colonial history: the establishment of British rule on the Kenya Coast which meant a fundamental change in the organisation of space and society. It resulted in major transformations of social relations, religious affiliation and ethnic boundaries. *Wolf (10)* traces the recent political history. Ethnically, the region is diverse and politics are characterised by patronage along ethnic lines. The Coast has not been an influential force in the national arena since Independence. *Sperling (11)* reviews the relation of religion and coastal society; how African traditional religion, Islam and Christianity have developed historically and interacted with each other.

Part IV deals with economic resources. Agriculture is the mainstay of the coastal economy and is reviewed by *Waaaijenberg (12)*. On the whole, agriculture is poorly developed mainly due to low and irregular rainfall and low soil fertility. Yields of the main food crops – maize, cassava, legumes, vegetables – are low in comparison with other parts of the country. Commercial farming is constrained by marketing facilities, reviewed by *Dijkstra (13)*. Firstly, there are the long distances as a result of the stringlike habitation; secondly, there is the poor condition of many rural access roads; and finally, there are the

difficulties in the supply of agricultural inputs. The poor rural infrastructure, in general, also works against rural industrialisation and enterprise development. *Masai (14)*, in the chapter on regional industrialisation, regards the government efforts at dispersion of industry to have been largely unsuccessful. Tourism is an important sector of the national economy. But *Sindiga (15)* argues that, although a major part of the tourism sector is directed towards the Coast, its importance for the regional economy is minor. The backward linkages in respect of local agriculture and employment are weak. *Ikiara (16)* reports how formal employment is concentrated in the service sector which reflects the low level of industrialisation in the region.

Part V deals with human resources. *Eisemon (17)* discusses the causes of the educational marginalization in the region. He describes the resistance of the Muslim population to western education and the neglect by local councils. Other important human resources that pose constraints are health conditions and nutrition. *Boerma & Bennett (18)* discuss the existing health infrastructure with particular attention to fertility, maternal and child care. The mortality and morbidity of the major illnesses at the Coast are also reviewed. *Klaver & Mwadime (19)* discuss food availability and food adequacy in a region which is only 50% food self-sufficient, and the existing levels of energy and nutrient intake and consequent nutritional status. Gender aspects of development are discussed by *Mitullab (20)* who argues that there are large disparities between men and women in terms of social, economic and political standing due to low levels of education and cultural beliefs and practices.

Part VI consists of a number of case studies in development that were brought together partly by choice, partly by opportunity. The reviews of land settlement by *Hoorweg (21)* and dairy development by *Leegwater & Hoorweg (24)* are examples of rural

development, successful to some extent. The regional settlement schemes initiated over the past 30 years nearly all had difficult starts but will eventually settle about 135,000 people. Dairy development in Kilifi District is an example of a successful sector, due to a combination of favourable factors. Housing is reviewed by *Macoloo* (22) and water supply by *Krboda* (23). They describe attempts to improve important infrastructural components that had only limited success over time. Housing conditions of most people are poor and homelessness in Mombasa remains high. Rural water supply can hardly meet demand and modern water supply already poses a major bottleneck. Finally, port development is given special attention in the chapter by *Hoyle*

(25). Mombasa links important inland and maritime transport systems and the performance of the port is determined by economic growth as well the quality of management.

Part VII presents a concluding chapter about the kind of changes that will be needed for future development. It summarises the preceding chapters and reviews the potential and limitations for development. The chapter concludes with a discussion of regional priorities.

Finally, two further sections are included, one with recent facts and figures on economic and social indicators, the other with a comprehensive bibliography on social sciences for the years 1890-1998.

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