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RURAL HOUSING CONDITIONS IN KISII DISTRICT, KENYA

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INTRODUCTION

Housing conditions in the Third World have been paid attention to by individual research workers, research institutes, local and central government departments and international organizations. Over time, this attention fluctuated in intensity and nature. Policy measures differed according to the view attached to the role of housing in development. In a previous report on housing conditions in rural Kenya, three different views were distinguished as to the role of housing in development (Sterkenburg, 1978).

1. Housing is a durable type of investment, requiring a considerable capital outlay and giving low returns to investment. In view of capital scarcity, housing improvement should receive a low priority in comparison with productive investments.
2. Housing is an essential element of integrated development. Good housing improves the living conditions of the labour force and leads to higher productivity. Therefore, a certain percentage of national expenditure should go to housing and housing improvement.
3. Housing is a basic need of the population of the Third World. The finance required to improve the housing conditions of the masses of the population are of such a magnitude that governments of Third World countries are unable to contribute in any substantial way to the solution of the housing problem. Therefore, housing improvements should be based on the activities of the inhabitants themselves, with only marginal assistance on the part of the government. The emphasis has to be put on self-help housing and site-and-service schemes.

The latter view gained momentum during the 1970s, when housing conditions got special attention at the international conference on human settlement and housing at Vancouver in 1976.

The attention paid to housing conditions in the Third World especially applies to the towns and cities. Very few studies focus on housing in the rural areas in Third World countries. Moreover, there is an almost complete absence of studies which focus on housing conditions in the rural areas of Africa south of the Sahara. This lack of attention should be explained in terms of the seemingly better situation in the rural areas as compared to the urban slums and squatter settlements, the growth-oriented development policies with one-sided attention for so-called modern production activities and consequent priority for urban areas, and the disproportionate political influence of urban-based segments of the population.

The little information available on rural housing conditions in Africa south of the Sahara is chiefly provided by architects and anthropologists. At the same time, one observes a strong attention for the shape of the houses and the type of building material. The following general characteristics appear: houses in the rural areas are generally built with local materials and are often of a traditional type. They either have a rectangular shape or a round one, and usually consist of a single living space. They are built by the inhabitants themselves, chiefly in the slack season of agricultural activities. Amenities such as water supply and electricity are completely absent in many parts. Changes in housing conditions in the rural areas comprise (1) a rather general change to rectangular houses in those parts where the round ones formed the

traditional type; (2) a more intensive use of new building materials such as concrete blocks and, particularly, corrugated iron roof sheets, or an improved use of local materials such as baked bricks and improved thatching; and (3) a slow expansion of amenities, rural water supply in particular. The differentiation in housing conditions now beginning to appear in the rural parts of Africa south of the Sahara is heavily determined by increasing income inequality as a result of the selective commercialization of agriculture and a related diversified structure of production.

In comparison with other countries in Africa south of the Sahara, Kenya gave quite some attention to housing research. This is closely associated with the activities of the Housing Research and Development Unit of the University of Nairobi. Due to inadequate resources attention goes primarily to the urban environment. For Kenya too, little is known about housing conditions in the rural areas.

The objective of this research can be formulated as follows: to provide insight into the spatial differentiation of the present state of housing conditions in Kisii District, to identify the factors influencing the housing conditions, and to make suggestions for improvement in accordance with the preferences of the local population.

This objective may be specified through the following research questions:

1. Which are the characteristics of the present housing conditions of the various homogeneous sub-areas of Kisii District?
2. Which factors are responsible for the present housing conditions observed in each of the sub-areas?
3. To which extent is the local population satisfied with the present housing conditions?
4. What are the characteristics of the central and local government policy for the district and to what extent do policy measures meet the local population's demand for improved housing?
5. In which ways may the housing conditions be improved?

Housing conditions comprise the following aspects:

- type of house in terms of shape and nature of building materials;
- size of the house and the homestead in terms of in- and outdoor living space per person;
- available amenities such as kitchen, toilet, water and electricity; and
- availability of and access to infrastructural and community services such as health and education facilities and public transport.

Housing conditions differ for the various areas and within certain areas under the impact of a number of factors, such as ecological conditions, including the local availability of building materials; the degree of commercialization of agriculture, the extent and nature of non-agricultural production activities and other factors influencing the long-term level and security of income; and the specific policy measures of central and local government organizations. Consequently, the research into housing conditions has to be carried out at various levels of geographical scale. At the national level attention has to be paid to government policy. At the sub-national level, i.e. the district, both the implementation of this policy and the socio-economic structure of the district have to be analysed. The latter analysis results in a sub-division of the district

into homogeneous agricultural areas according to various criteria with an expected concomitant homogeneity in housing requirements and conditions. Finally, within these homogeneous agricultural areas differences in housing conditions between households have to be looked for and the factors responsible for these differences have to be specified.

Research into rural housing conditions comprises a construction-technical and a socio-economic component. The construction-technical component deals with the technical conditions of the house, the necessity for improvement and the costs involved, taking account of alternative types of solutions and building materials. The socio-economic component is directed towards explaining the observed housing conditions in relation to the socio-economic position of the household and the outside forces either directly or indirectly influencing housing conditions.

In order to collect the relevant data about the rural housing conditions in Kisii District, three broad methods have been used, viz. the study of literature and government reports, interviews with key informants at the various levels of geographical scale, and a sample survey of households in one sub-location in each of the three homogeneous sub-area distinguished in the Kisii District.

This report consists of three sections. In the first chapter the general background of the Kisii District is outlined, including the agricultural structure and the income situation, while the services at the district level relevant for housing are sketched. The second and main chapter deals with the observed housing conditions and the factors responsible. In the third chapter the preferences of the local population are compared with government policies. Finally, a brief summary of results and some conclusions are given.