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Rural housing conditions in Kakamega District, Kenya

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INTRODUCTION

Housing conditions in rural areas of the Third World countries receive very little attention, particularly if compared with the proportional share in the total populations of these countries. In both studies and policy measures, the emphasis is put on the urban environment, with priority for the bigger cities. This situation is also found in Sub-Saharan Africa. The increased attention for housing in general which can be observed during the last decade did not change this urban bias. Various factors contribute to this urban bias, such as the assumed better housing conditions in the rural areas if compared to the urban slums and squatter settlements; development policies which in spite of all verbal commitments to basic needs, still concentrate heavily on economic growth only with dominant attention for so-called modern production activities and consequent priority for urban areas, and probably as most important factor - the disproportionate political influence of the urban-based segments of the population.

In Kenya, which gave quite some attention to housing research the emphasis is also on studies of urban housing conditions. Gradually, some more information comes available about the rural housing situation: so far surveys have been undertaken for Kiambu, Kisii and Kisumu districts. Still, knowledge about the variety of factors influencing housing conditions in the rural areas of Kenya is inadequate.

The objective of the Kakamega research can be formulated as follows: to provide insight into the spatial differentiation of the present state of housing conditions in Kisumu 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 in the various homogeneous sub-areas of the Kakamega 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?

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.

The housing situation in Kakamega District is assumed to be influenced by a number of specific conditions: high population density and small farm size in many parts of the district, which reduces the possibilities of cash crop cultivation and monetary farm incomes; the labour migration phenomenon as a crucial source of monetary income; and the spatial differentiation in the importance of cash crop farming and labour migration. In addition, government policy, especially with respect to amenities and services forms a major determinant of the quality of housing in rural areas.

The data on which this report is based, has been collected by three broad methods, viz. the study of literature and government reports, interviews with key informants such as e.g. government officers, and a sample survey among households in the various sub-areas of the district.

The report consists of five sections. After a general background of the district and the main features of its economy, a picture is sketched of the settlement pattern and the housing situation in general and the pattern of relevant services at the district level. Subsequently, detailed information is provided about the employment and income situation of the households in the various sub-areas. A fourth chapter deals with the actual housing conditions and the factors responsible for these conditions. A fifth chapter is devoted to the preferences of the local population and the specific characteristics of government policy at the district level. Finally, a brief summary of the results and some conclusions are given.