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**TOBACCO AND SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL CHANGE IN KURIA DISTRICT  
KENYA, 1969-2002: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**



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## ABSTRACT

Tobacco is a cash crop that has been produced in Kenya for almost a century now. Since its inception, its culture, use, health and economic implications have become issues of social and academic inquiry. Growing concerns have been expressed not only about the health hazards involved in tobacco production but also about the environmental unsustainability of the crop in terms of excessive use of wood. Today, the crop poses a particularly difficult dilemma for development since its production has generated a wide range of employment, income, foreign exchange earnings and other cash contributing effects, while the damage to the environment and food security in general seems to outweigh the benefits. These complexities challenge researchers and policy makers to address the dynamics of agricultural intensification and local scale land-use systems and their long terms implications. This study is an attempt to examine how forces involved within tobacco production transformed a once economically self-sufficient people with an agro-pastoral economy into dependent contract producers for the international market between 1969 and 2002. The study takes into account not only shifts in land use and valuation but also the ways that the Kuria have come to conceive of, and work with local ecological dynamics. Such transformation and its trajectory is informed by theoretical analysis relating to the injection of capital into agriculture—the articulation of modes of production with specific reference to the peasantry and tobacco agribusiness. Modernisation, dependency and ecology theories were used to compliment and provide useful insight to the study. Methodology used in this research was based on sampling of archival sources and oral narratives in form of field interviews and eyewitness accounts. Secondary sources included books, journals, newspapers, magazines, articles, unpublished theses, seminar papers, periodicals, agricultural annual reports, tobacco companies' reports, National Cereals and Produce Board annual reports, environment and natural resources annual reports—these were also, analysed. Oral sources in form of perceptions tobacco growers were also used to establish ecological changes in the district, while land use history was sought using archival documents and interpretation of maps drawn before and after introduction of tobacco. In sum it was found that tobacco is a driving force to/for key/major? Socio-ecological changes in Kuria District.

<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.0 Background to the Study .....	1
1.1 Context of the Problem.....	3
1.2 Statement of the Problem .....	6
1.3 Objectives of the Study.....	6
1.4 Research Premises .....	6
1.5 Significance of the Study.....	7
1.6 Scope and Limitation of the Study .....	8
1.7 Literature Review .....	9
1.8 Theoretical Framework.....	21
1.9 Methodology.....	27

**CHAPTER 2: SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL CHANGE IN KURIA DISTRICT  
BEFORE THE INTRODUCTION OF TOBACCO IN 1969 : THE PEOPLE**

<b>AND LAND .....</b>	<b>33</b>
2.0 Introduction .....	33
2.1 The Kuria Migration and Social Organisation .....	34
2.2 Kuria Systems of Land Use.....	37
2.3 The Kuria as Pastoralists .....	38
2.4 Crop Patterns and Agrarian Relations of Production .....	41
2.5 Gender and Labour In Kuria Social Relations.....	47
2.6 Kuria Indigenous Environmental Management and Grazing Strategies .....	52
2.7 The Kuria Socio-Ecological Change after the Second World War .....	60
2.8 The Domestication of the Swynnerton Plan, 1954-1969.....	68
2.9 Conclusion.....	77

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>DECLARATION AND APPROVAL</b> .....	<b>ii</b>
<b>COPYRIGHT</b> .....	<b>iii</b>
<b>DEDICATION</b> .....	<b>iv</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENT</b> .....	<b>v</b>
<b>ABBREVIATIONS</b> .....	<b>vi</b>
<b>GLOSSARY OF TERMS</b> .....	<b>vii</b>
<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	<b>ix</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b> .....	<b>x</b>
<b>LIST OF TABLES</b> .....	<b>xiii</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b> .....	<b>xiv</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>1</b>
1.0 Background to the Study .....	1
1.1 Context of the Problem.....	3
1.2 Statement of the Problem .....	6
1.3 Objectives of the Study.....	6
1.4 Research Premises .....	6
1.5 Significance of the Study.....	7
1.6 Scope and Limitation of the Study .....	8
1.7 Literature Review .....	9
1.8 Theoretical Framework.....	21
1.9 Methodology.....	27
<b>CHAPTER 2: SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL CHANGE IN KURIA DISTRICT BEFORE THE INTRODUCTION OF TOBACCO IN 1969 : THE PEOPLE AND LAND</b> .....	<b>33</b>
2.0 Introduction .....	33
2.1 The Kuria Migration and Social Organisation .....	34
2.2 Kuria Systems of Land Use.....	37
2.3 The Kuria as Pastoralists .....	38
2.4 Crop Patterns and Agrarian Relations of Production .....	41
2.5 Gender and Labour In Kuria Social Relations.....	47
2.6 Kuria Indigenous Environmental Management and Grazing Strategies .....	52
2.7 The Kuria Socio-Ecological Change after the Second World War .....	60
2.8 The Domestication of the Swynnerton Plan, 1954-1969.....	68
2.9 Conclusion.....	77

<b>CHAPTER 3: THE ESTABLISHMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF TOBACCO FARMING IN KURIA DISTRICT, 1969-2002</b> .....	<b>81</b>
3.0 Introduction .....	81
3.1 Introduction of Exotic Tobacco in Kuria: The Demonstration Stage, 1969-1975 .....	85
3.2 The Evaluation Stage: The Special Rural Development Programme (SRDP) and Tobacco Production, 1970-1975 .....	92
3.3 The Take-Off Stage: Tobacco Production after SDRP, 1975-1980 .....	103
3.4 The Boom Stage: Tobacco and Changing Rural Economy in Kuria, 1980-1990 .....	109
3.5 The Boom Goes Bust: Decline of Tobacco Production its Consequences, 1999-2002 .....	119
3.6 Conclusion .....	131
<b>CHAPTER 4: TOBACCO FARMING AND THE CHANGES IN CATTLE ECONOMY, 1969-2002</b> .....	<b>133</b>
4.0 Introduction .....	133
4.1 Changes in Cattle Economy: Re-Assessing Colonial and Postcolonial Periods to <i>Circa</i> , 1969 .....	134
4.2 Tobacco and Changes in Livestock Economy, 1969-2002 .....	147
4.3 Decline of Tobacco and the Evolution of Kuria Raiding and Violence, 1990-2002 .....	153
4.4 Conclusion .....	157
<b>CHAPTER 5: TOBACCO AND CHANGES IN GENDER RELATIONS, 1969-2002</b> .....	<b>159</b>
5.0 Introduction .....	159
5.1 Social Organisation in Tobacco Production, 1969-2002 .....	161
5.2 Continuity and Changes in Gendered Response to Tobacco Production .....	168
5.3 Resource Struggle and Family Strategy in Tobacco Production .....	175
5.4 Conclusion .....	181
<b>CHAPTER 6: TOBACCO, LAND USE AND ECOLOGICAL CHANGE IN KURIA, 1969-2002</b> .....	<b>184</b>
6.0 Introduction .....	184
6.1 Tobacco and Environmental Change .....	185
6.2 Patterns of Environmental Change in Kuria District, 1969-2002 .....	187
6.3 BAT Tree Afforestation Programme, 1978-1998 .....	206

6.4	The Kuria Social Responses to Environmental Change and Economic Vulnerability, 1969-2002.....	213
6.5	People's Perceptions Tobacco Land Use and Cover Change.....	220
6.6	Conclusion.....	239
<b>CHAPTER 7.....</b>		<b>242</b>
<b>THE INTERNATIONAL CAPITAL AND CHANGES IN SOCIAL RELATIONS OF PRODUCTION, 1974-2002 .....</b>		<b>242</b>
7.0	Introduction .....	242
7.1	Contract Farming and the Politics of Tobacco Production: From International to Local Forces.....	243
7.2	Tobacco, National and Local Politics in Kenya, 1974-2002.....	248
7.3	BAT and Mastermind Wars, 1987-2002 .....	257
7.4	Conclusion.....	268
<b>CHAPTER 8.....</b>		<b>270</b>
<b>CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....</b>		<b>270</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>		<b>278</b>
<b>APPENDICES.....</b>		<b>296</b>
<b>APPENDIX I: SAMPLE QUESTIONS.....</b>		<b>296</b>
<b>APPENDIX II : LIST RESPONDENTS .....</b>		<b>298</b>
<b>APPENDIX III : CLASSIFICATION OF SOIL AND LAND.....</b>		<b>300</b>
<b>APPENDIX IV: CLASSIFICATION OF PASTURELAND.....</b>		<b>300</b>