
CONCLUSION: CULTURE, RESOURCES AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE KENYA COAST

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INTRODUCTION*

Stereotypes about the Kenya Coast and its peoples abound. In short, the region is considered backward with poor agricultural and economic prospects which are aggravated by negative climatic and cultural factors. Many of these stereotypes are repeated, as a matter of course, in popular and scientific publications. And although they may not be entirely without insight, evidence to the contrary is often disregarded while important mediating factors and finer distinctions are usually ignored. Not all coastal characteristics are negative and this book is an attempt to set the record straight. For example, there are marine and littoral resources such as the coral reefs, wetlands and mangrove forests rich in biodiversity. There is also a cultural heritage going back more than a thousand years which is unique in the country. Still, it is true that the Kenya Coast differs from the rest of the country in its combination of existing resources and economy, historical and population factors, and the potential and obstacles for development.

In earlier times, the Kenya Coast offered the first landfall after the Somali desert for travellers coming from Arabia, India and even China during the latter's period of sea exploration (Hall 1996). However, the Kenya Coast, unlike the coasts of Tanzania and Mozambique, has a barren hinterland that was not easily penetrated – the Nyika, or Taru Desert, which starts about 25-50 km inland.¹ Early on, most contacts were with other coastal communities, even with far-away cultures, but there were few ties with the African interior. The connections with central Kenya were still relatively weak at the time of Independence. Overseas ties, namely with Zanzibar and Oman, were stronger than with other parts of Kenya. It is against this background that the society and economy of the Kenya Coast have to be understood. Geography, climate and history have resulted in unique political, religious and economic characteristics that still influence modern-day developments.

This monograph examines the Kenya Coast from different angles: the economy and resources; the population and cultural characteristics; and the po-

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1 The nineteenth-century caravans steered clear of this scrub desert, usually travelling south of it to reach the African interior (Beachy 1996).

tential and obstacles for development. The chapters, so far, contain reviews of specific disciplines or describe certain areas of development. There is a certain amount of overlap but this is deemed acceptable to assure the cohesion of individual chapters. There are occasional disagreements among authors although, on the whole, opinions about the current state of the Kenya Coast and the causes behind it do not differ greatly. Common themes are highlighted in this conclusion with ideas about possible changes that are needed to lead the area out of the current stalemate.

RESOURCES AND ECONOMY

In his review of physical resources and infrastructure, *Foeken* (3) concludes that the coastal region is modestly endowed and, in many respects, little developed.² But he concludes that, above all, there exist great variations in soil fertility, rainfall and agricultural potential. Soil characteristics are generally poor with limited agricultural potential. Rainfall is characterised by a unimodal pattern allowing for one harvest in most years. Different agro-ecological zones alternate over short distances. A combination of fertile soils and relatively high rainfall is rare, occurring only in the Kilifi Uplands and the Taita Hills. This is in strong contrast with other regions, notably the central and western parts of the country where crop performance is better.

The true resources of the region are marine and coastal in nature, reviewed in the chapter by *Aloo* (4). The coastline shows great variation of habitats including estuaries, sandy shorelines, creeks, caves, mangrove swamps, sand dunes and coral reefs (Frazier 1993). The coral reefs of Kenya are mainly of the fringing type, closely following the coastline with many coral species as well as a great variety of fish and other reef animals. There is a more or less

continuous stretch of coral reefs of about 200 km between Shimoni and Malindi. Reefs also exist in the Lamu-Kiunga area. The coral reefs are important for tourism and also for fishing; more precisely as breeding grounds. In general, however, the coastal waters are not particularly rich in fish populations, mainly because of the narrow width of the continental shelf.

The major wetlands are the swamps of the Tana Delta which experience strong seasonal expansion after the rains in the highlands. This area and its ecosystems have received little study so far. The Tana and Sabaki rivers are the two rivers that originate in the Kenyan highlands and they are strongly influenced by conditions up-stream. The other rivers, such as the Ramisi, draw their water from within the coastal region.

The large mangrove areas have always been of ecological and economic importance. Mangrove trees protect the sea from land pollution, protect the land from sea erosion and provide breeding grounds for fish and crustaceans (Ruwa 1996). They are used as fuelwood and as timber for construction of houses and boats; mangrove poles were formerly exported to the countries of the Middle East (Curtin 1981). Two-thirds to three-quarters of the mangrove forest is situated in remote Lamu District although there is uncertainty about the actual acreage (Ferguson 1996).

Arabuko-Sokoke Forest is the largest coastal forest remaining in the East African lowlands. It consists of three types of woody vegetation and has great biodiversity both in flora and fauna (Burgess, Fitzgibbon & Clarke 1996). The smaller *kaya* forests were protected in the past by the local population as sacred places and burial grounds. Presently they number about 40 and they vary in size from a few to over 400 hectares (Githitho 1997).

² Cross-references to other chapters are given by name of author and chapter number in italics.

Before 1800, the wealth of the Kenya Coast lay in the mercantile society of the Swahili and Arabs, with exports of local produce and slaves as *Middleton (8)* and *Cooper (9)* describe. In the course of the nineteenth century, Arab and Swahili landowners acquired large tracts of land under the protection of the Sultan of Zanzibar, and many developed prosperous plantations. During this period, the region reportedly served as a grain basket, exporting to the Middle East. At this time, there was a small population cultivating the most fertile lands and crops were grown on large plantations with a system of slave labour. Nowadays, the population has greatly multiplied and many smallholders have to cultivate land with far less agricultural potential. After the abolition of slavery in 1907, the plantation economy declined and many people settled as squatters on unused parts of estates and on state-owned land. The abolition of slavery created two problems that have plagued the Coast since then: that of land titles and that of scarcity of labour (*Waaijienberg 1993*). In the same year, 1907, the colonial capital was moved to Nairobi with a switch in policy focus towards up-country settlers and their economic interests. Already at the time of Independence, there existed large inequalities between regions and between population groups in Kenya; most of these had evolved during the period of colonial domination.

Meilink (2) finds the existing evidence on regional inequality to be equivocal. Economically, Coast Province lags behind Nairobi and Central Province, but so do the other provinces, particularly North-Eastern and Western. During the 1950s and 1960s, the highland areas developed at a faster pace — particularly the smallholder export crops — than the lowland regions because government policies offered more to the former. However, when economic indicators such as marketed output, gross domestic product, incomes, wage employment and wage earnings are examined, Coast Province often

takes a middle position or higher, particularly when these indicators are calculated per capita. In terms of food provision, the Coast is a chronic deficit area. Less than half of the food requirements of households is produced locally and the income spent on food is twice the national average. Average household income in the region is not the lowest in the country; non-farm employment provides the larger share of household income and farming income is not as important as elsewhere in Kenya.

Available information on household poverty is contradictory. Government data from 1974 and later research in 1986 revealed a high percentage of food-poor households in the rural areas of the Coast (*Greer & Thorbecke 1986; Hoorweg, Foeken & Klaver 1995*). But, later findings reported by *Meilink (2)* appear to indicate that economic poverty is localised particularly in Western and Nyanza Provinces. However, the most recent government information (*Kenya 1998b, 1998c*) again indicates that Coast Province has one of the highest incidences of absolute poverty (55% of the households) together with Eastern (56%) and North-Eastern (58%) Provinces.

Other indicators also show a disadvantaged position of Coast Province. It has the highest percentage of stunted children, a high child mortality rate and the lowest educational enrolment rates. The number of households with safe drinking water is relatively low and the housing conditions of many people are poor.

PEOPLE AND HISTORY

The peoples of the Coast form a mixed population: Arabs, Swahili, Indians, Mijikenda (who are themselves divided in nine sub-tribes, as the name says), Bajun and other groups from the northern Coast, Luo, Kamba, Kikuyu and other up-country Kenyans, together with foreign residents and a varying number of international tourists.³

³ Estimated at an average of 50,000, at any one time

By the time of the last population census, in 1999, the number of people in Coast Province had reached 2.49 million, maintaining a steady 3.1% growth rate since 1979 (Daily Nation 2000a). A fertility rate of 5.8 is below that of high fertility regions elsewhere in the country (North-Eastern and Western Provinces with 7.6) but it is still high (Kenya 1996a: 35). *Wakajumrah* (6) further notes that despite a recent decline, all categories of mortality remain high in the Coast. As a result of the combination of high birth and high death rates there is a youthful age structure.

The majority of the Bantu-speaking peoples are from four clusters: Mijikenda, Pokomo, Taita and Swahili. The main population, the Mijikenda, originate from southern Somalia. According to oral tradition, they started to move into the area at the turn of the seventeenth century although there are indications that their presence dates even earlier. Initially they settled in *kayas*, fortified hill-top villages, but they changed to a more dispersed form of habitation in the nineteenth century. Migration to the coastal plain increased further after Independence. At the same time, there was in-migration from up-country groups such as Luo, Kamba and Kikuyu seeking employment and business opportunities.

Swahili and non-Swahili groups are traditionally part of a wider community along the East African coast. *Middleton* (8) describes the Swahili as a group of merchants that traditionally occupied a middleman position in African-Asian commerce. They played the role of commercial leaders and organisers of other peoples in the region. Non-Swahili have generally accepted this hegemony and, in that sense, the Swahili encompassed and defined a larger coastal identity. The importance of the Swahili has diminished since the decline of Indian Ocean commerce and their former role has been taken over by the central government.

(Kenya, 1994)

There exists considerable religious diversity, from African traditional religion to Islam, which has been here for more than a thousand years, and Christianity as a more recent arrival. *Sperling* (11) notes that the indigenous coastal peoples, though divided by other sources of tension and conflict, have tolerated religious diversity for centuries and that different religions can be present within the same village and even within the same family. Traditional beliefs and practices, well suited to the needs of village life, can be inadequate for coping with the stresses and problems of modern life and in such conditions, the universal nature of Christianity and Islam is appealing. Nevertheless, traditional religion still retains a strong influence on fundamental beliefs and values to the extent that a person can be Muslim or Christian while resident in town or near the place of work and revert to traditional religion when at home in the village of birth.

The Coast of East Africa was once part of the Indian Ocean world, connected by Islam as well as commerce. European colonisation meant the end of the slave trade and slave plantations that sustained these connections (*Cooper*, 9). The colonial state undermined the power of the slave holders, but did not replace it with an economic system that generated sufficient labour to keep the estate agriculture going. The ex-slaves and the Mijikenda, by and large, showed a reluctance to work as agricultural labourers and often preferred temporary labour in Mombasa port. While the power of the Swahili elite declined, former slaves and peasants utilised many of the small opportunities that the colonial economy offered.

Many up-country migrants also flocked to Mombasa which soon came to be dominated by non-Swahili and non-Muslim. Over time, the coastal population was left vulnerable to competition from up-country workers who soon organised themselves and negotiated better employment conditions dur-

ing the Mombasa strikes in the 1930s and '40s. The workers from coastal origin benefited as well from the pay-rises but the ensuing work demands from the employers slowly forced out the local workers (*Cooper, 9*). After Independence, all migration restrictions were abolished resulting in a further influx of migrants. This migration stream traditionally ended in Mombasa Municipality. Natural increase and in-migration, over time, greatly augmented the size of the urban labour force and this has resulted in problems of unemployment and poverty (*Obudho, 7*). According to *Macoloo (22)*, homelessness in Mombasa remains unabated. Recent government surveys, in fact, have established that among the large towns in the country, Mombasa has the second highest prevalence of absolute poverty with 33%.⁴ Recently, migration trends have been noted towards small urban centres.⁵

Several authors emphasise that the coast of Kenya has never been culturally homogeneous or a community of equals. *Cooper (9)* argues that the various groups tried to strengthen their internal ties in their competition for resources from early on. Soon the divisions among groups deepened with increasing tension; tension and conflict arose within individual cities, among Muslim groups, between Muslims and non-Muslims, and between local and up-country political elements. *Wolf (10)* describes the profound fears of up-country domination that existed at the time of Independence. Arabs and Swahili desired to preserve their status within the wider coastal Islamic hegemony. For their part, most non-Muslims feared competition from up-country groups who now had the advantage of political power. The political incorporation into a wider Kenya

succeeded because of the very heterogeneity and factionalism of coastal politics (*Wolf, 10*). But, it has come at the price of a patronage system that manages to control the political distribution of resources with a minimum of overt coercion and violence. Still, it has been important for those at the 'centre' to have loyal followers in place to ensure political control. The local population – rightly – perceives this as a form of political and economic marginalisation, something which has created much resentment, in turn.

Nearly all the existing analysis is in terms of religious and ethnic differences even though there are large economic differences within the various groups but this is less focus of academic debate or of political agitation.

DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL

The economic linchpins of the Coast are agriculture, tourism and the industrial hub of Mombasa. A quarter of the land can be used for crop cultivation, a quarter for ranching in combination with cereal cultivation and the remaining half is fit only for ranching. Most of the arable land is not well suited for maize cultivation (although it is the major staple crop) or cash crops, such as coffee and tea, but it is suitable for more hardy crops such as cassava, millet and sisal. *Waaijenberg (12)* notes that the indigenous farmers, through generations, have learned to exploit a wide variety of terrain by means of agricultural diversification and by utilising a wide stock of genetic materials. The leading cash crops are vegetables and tree crops like mango, banana, citrus, coconut and cashew, in that order. There is a high demand for vegetables in the Coast but the markets are dominated by suppliers from up-country (*Dijkstra, 13*), where rains are more reliable and commercial vegetable growing had an earlier start. Coconut palms, the traditional mainstay of Mijikenda households, can generate a modest income with the sale of leaves

4 Kisumu was the highest with 49% (Kenya 1998b)

5 The intercensal growth rate of the urban population, 1979-89, for Mombasa was 3.0%; but for Coast Province as a whole was 3.7%; which indicates a growth rate of the other urban centres in the coast of about 9% (Kenya 1996b: 39, 41)

for roof cover, popular with hotels and foreign residents. The nuts are used for copra for industrial extraction and for local consumption but prices are low and the proceeds are modest.

The basin and delta of the Tana River have potential to be used for irrigation although earlier experiences up-stream at Bura and Hola have not been favourable. The delta also has potential as a nature reserve. The large expanses of thinly populated land are a potential resource in that they are suitable for ranching, especially in Tana River District (*Waaijen-berg, 12*). However, livestock development suffers from lack of water, poor infrastructure, veterinary problems and lack of organisation. The capital required for improving land and herd management may have to come from outside the areas concerned.

There has been extensive experience with land settlement in the Kenya Coast, some positive, some negative, as described by *Hoorweg (21)*. The settlement schemes that have been started so far may eventually settle about 135,000 people or about 8% of the current rural population. A number of schemes are situated in the coastal plain, not far from urban centres, where often there were already large numbers of squatters. Other schemes were started in sparsely inhabited land as in the Shimba Hills and the area around Lake Kenyatta. Despite great hardships for the initial settlers, schemes have generally come to maturity, with the exception of the one at Magarini. Recent settlement efforts are concentrated in Lamu District, although security problems are a major hindrance. The improved road connections with Malindi are likely to improve security. This, in turn, may stimulate the development of the Lamu mainland, which used to be a prosperous area in the last century (*Romero 1997*).

The modern sector economy depends on the port-city of Mombasa and international tourism. Mombasa

is not only a port but also an industrial centre, a centre of regional administration and an urban conglomeration (*Obudbo, 7*). As port, Mombasa fulfils a key function in the urban, regional and national economies. It handles the import and export streams of Kenya and for countries of the interior such as Uganda and Rwanda. This has provided an economic boost of sorts ever since the railway was completed. *Hoyle (25)* notes that there has been a history of inefficient port management, low productivity and decreasing competitiveness in the 1980s – and we should add widespread corruption – but he is of the opinion that recently there are signs of enhanced efficiency.

Mombasa is the obvious centre for industrial activity in the province. *Masai (14)* mentions the natural harbour, the air, rail and road connections, and the existing banking industry. Mombasa accounts for 90% of the industrial establishments in Coast Province despite government policies aimed at greater geographical dispersal of the industrial sector (*Ikiara, 16*). However, nationally, as a centre of industry, Mombasa plays a modest role compared to Nairobi. In 1993, when Mombasa had a third of the population of Nairobi, it also achieved one-third of the industrial earnings⁶ of the capital. The growth in employment was 81% over the period 1980-96, which is near the natural rate of population growth. A feature of modern wage employment is the large share of the service sector, reflecting the heavy dependence on tourism, commerce, transport and communication. Healthy economic growth requires industrial diversification, especially development of the manufacturing sector. Indeed, between 1984 and 1995 the manufacturing sector in Mombasa increased by 56% compared to 25% for Nairobi.⁷

6 K&368,000 vs K& 1,198,000 (Kenya 1994).

7 Number of employees in manufacturing: Nairobi 1984: 60,600, and 1997: 75,500; Mombasa 1984: 19,500, and 1997: 30,600 (Kenya 1990, 1998a).

Tourism is the leading foreign exchange earner in Kenya and about 60% of the tourists visit the Coast. Tourism could be a regional mainstay but for three reasons (*Sindiga, 15*). Firstly, there is a high degree of vertical integration of tourist operations connecting airlines, tour firms and hotels. The high degree of foreign ownership and the consequent dominance of foreign business interests result in the siphoning of much of the foreign exchange earnings abroad. Secondly, the backward linkages with agriculture are mostly with up-country agriculture and large producers – not coastal farmers. Thirdly, employment opportunities do not benefit the local population, primarily since many hotel workers come from elsewhere in the country. In general, the economic impact of tourism on the local economy should not be overestimated and *Sindiga (15)*, in his review, goes so far as to say that beach tourism is subsidised by the Kenyan economy. The lack of impact is aggravated by the recent negative developments in the tourist industry. A large drop in the number of tourists has been experienced since 1997, due to the political insecurity in the area. Moreover, the annual contingent of visitors increasingly consists of low-budget tourists who are booked on all-inclusive packages and who tend to stay mostly within the confines of their hotels.

DEVELOPMENT LIMITATIONS

The Kenya Coast suffers the same problems and constraints that characterise the rest of Kenya, namely regional marginalisation, poor infrastructure, poor health services, government mismanagement and inefficiency, corruption and ethnic tensions. These factors are of national concern and not easy to address in a regional context; yet, there are certain factors that affect the Kenya Coast particularly. From the different accounts in this monograph, a number of factors have come to the fore that require closer examination, namely environmental degradation,

certain infrastructural constraints and human constraints.

Environmental degradation

The coast has a rich and varied environment but marine and littoral resources are threatened to greater or lesser extent.⁸ They are threatened by naturally occurring processes, increasing subsistence needs of the growing population and increased commercial exploitation. *Aloo (4)* and *Tole (5)* mention widespread destruction of natural resources and serious degradation of the environment.

The Tana and Sabaki estuaries and wetlands experience the effects of upstream deforestation and sedimentation as well as pollution from agricultural and industrial waste. Local catchments, such as the Ramisi River, appear less affected by these factors. However, some local rivers that used to be permanent have now become seasonal in nature, probably as a result of the upstream felling of trees and cultivation of river borders (*Robertson 1997*).

The coral reefs suffer the combined effects of several factors: siltation of the main rivers due to increased erosion upstream, bleaching because of the rise in sea water temperature, pollution by unprocessed sewage from beach hotels and urban areas, attacks by natural enemies such as certain sea urchins, (illegal) collection of shells for sales as curios, and inevitable damage from tourist visits to coral gardens and intensive fisheries of different kinds. Many nearshore areas are overfished with artisanal catches beyond maximum sustainable yields (*McClanahan & Obura 1996*). This is contested by local fishermen although individual catches are reportedly

⁸ The national environment plan lists the following coastal and marine issues for environmental action: silt and sewage threats to reefs; overexploitation of reef fisheries; overharvesting of mangrove trees; domestic and industrial pollution; sewage and waste disposal; management of fresh water supply; and salination of groundwater (*MENR, 1994*).

on the decline.

By all accounts, the mangrove forests have suffered a loss in area and decreases in the density and the maturity of mangrove stands (Kamau 1998; Ouko & Manohar 1998). This decline has occurred because of reclamation of land for economic purposes (such as salt ponds, shrimp farms and tourist facilities), increased use of mangrove trees as building material and firewood and commercial, often indiscriminate felling of trees.

As regards the inland environment, *Tole (5)* mentions problems affecting the vegetation cover: soil erosion as a result of overstocking and sparse animal watering holes. There is also a high incidence of wood burning for charcoal. The large forests and kayas are under threat because of clearing for agricultural and mining purposes⁹, logging for timber and cutting of saplings for fuel.

Much of the exploitation of natural resources is in the nature of extraction without attempt at restoration or rehabilitation. Although many of the commercial activities concerned provide some income or employment for the local communities, the main proceeds probably go to outsiders. By and large, community control over common resources is poor in most parts of the coastal strip which provides ample opportunity for political and economic manipulation. *Aloo (4)* notes that there is not only lack of education among local inhabitants but that there is also inadequate knowledge among experts coupled with poor management of the coastal resources. The main shortcoming of government management is not so much a lack of regulations but lack of co-ordination and implementation. The surveillance capacity of the government is limited and ineffective and, as a result, there is much abuse of regulations.

The environmental effects of tourism merit special mention. Coastal tourism is largely concentrated

near the sea front in six or seven locations. These are mostly on the southern coast, which places a heavy burden on the local reefs and beaches. Tourism-related activities such as hotel construction, furniture making and curio production use large numbers of hardwood trees and mangroves. Most hotels are not connected to sewerage systems and discharge raw effluent into the sea; solid waste disposal is a serious problem as well. Eventually, these unsanitary conditions may affect the tourist industry negatively because of potential health risks.

Domestic sewage accounts for about 10-20% of pollution levels, and industrial effluents account for 50-60%. Most sewage (70%) is produced in Mombasa (*Munga et al.* 1993). In the rural areas, but also in towns, pit latrines are the main form of sewage disposal. Septic tanks are used to a lesser extent. A sewage treatment plant exists in Mombasa but is largely dysfunctional, other towns lack reticulated drainage systems. Given this combination of circumstances, the danger of contamination of surface waters and groundwater is ever-present.

Infrastructural constraints

The main infrastructural impediments concern electricity supply, water supply, poor marketing facilities for agricultural produce and the persistent land problems. Electricity supply is largely dependent on the national grid and knows regular rationing while breakdowns are common; it is a reflection of the national energy situation.

Water supply poses a critical bottleneck as *Krboda (23)* shows. The coastal region is a net importer of water and there is shortage of water for domestic, industrial and agricultural use. Piped water is drawn from Mzima Springs and the Sabaki River but the infrastructure is obsolete, suffers frequent breakdowns and is insufficient for demand. During the last three decades, the demand for water in the coastal region has grown fast because of population

⁹ Including sand and soil harvesting usually without any attempt at rehabilitation.

growth, expanding tourism and industrial growth. Many boreholes have been sunk with heavy consumption of groundwater, particularly by beach hotels, with a resulting threat to groundwater quality because of sea water intrusion and pollution (Tole, 5). It may also be mentioned that the reticulated water supply in towns firstly goes to industries and consumers who can afford underground storage tanks that take in water, even when pressure is low.

The majority of the population relies on traditional means of water supply (groundwater, surface water and roof catchment). Many water dams were destroyed during the excessive rains of 1997 (Daily Nation 1998b). Presently, less than half the people have safe drinking water and water supply will be a bottleneck for human development. Water supply will also pose a limit on industrial growth. Today, industry uses only 13% of the total water supply but further industrial expansion will result in water demands that are difficult to meet. Eventually inadequate water supply may also affect tourism because it is another discomfort together with electricity disruptions, poor road conditions and harassment by beach vendors.

The problems associated with the operation and maintenance of an old, over-stretched water supply system are expected to increase. The escalating costs and the accompanying environmental problems make such conventional water supplies uneconomical. *Krboda* (23) argues the need for integrated planning and management of water resources while at the same time local communities have to be more involved in planning and implementation. Alternative water sources need to be developed. These include rain water harvesting particularly by large institutions and water recycling, which is gaining prominence elsewhere in water-deficient countries. So far, water desalination is more of a theoretical than a practical alternative because of the high costs.

The major challenge for improving agriculture is perhaps neither at the farm nor at production level, but the essential factor is the marketing of produce (*Dijkstra*, 13). The requirements of strict timing and high quality make it difficult for small fruit growers to participate in the export market. Main bottlenecks are the poor infrastructure and long distances: mangoes from the Tana valley and oranges from the Shimba Hills have often been left to rot for lack of marketing and transport facilities. The network of rural access roads, already in poor condition, has been damaged severely during the El Niño rains of 1997. Food marketing is controlled by private traders who specialise along commodity lines and according to marketing levels. In the case of vegetables and fruits many small traders face high competition. The costs of middlemen in regional and inter-regional trade are dependent on the risks associated with transport, and margins can be reduced if risks are lessened. This requires infrastructural improvements, notably of the system of rural access roads. With the sealing of the trunk road from Malindi to Garissa, marketing possibilities have improved for the areas north of Malindi.

Yet, in the case of agricultural development there are no quick remedies. *Leegwater & Hoorweg* (24) ascribe the success of the dairy industry in Kilifi District to three converging factors. Firstly, a long-term government project provided support to establish smallholder dairy farmers. Secondly, the start and expansion of a large, private dairy farm and dairy factory which was critical in providing stock and later served as a marketing channel. Finally, the deregulation of the milk trade which released the industry from the government straight jacket.

In the case of meat and fish, a few large companies are market leaders with a large turnover, a high degree of vertical integration and permanent relations with large institutional buyers such as hotels. Pastoralists, fishermen and small traders in meat and

fish benefit only to a limited extent from these big companies and there is need to strengthen the linkages between both groups of market participants (*Dijkstra, 13*). The supply of agricultural inputs suffers from the same marketing handicaps. The narrow coastal strip makes distances long which adds to transport costs. Inland, the distribution network is sparse, making purchases difficult. Both factors negatively influence the reliability of supply.

Land ownership and land tenure in Kenya are fraught with complications, no less so in the Coast. Communities are obsessed with land ownership as a sign and a means of prosperity. As part of the transfer arrangements leading to Independence, dormant land rights of Omani and Zanzibari owners in the coastal strip were fully recognised by the newly independent government (*Cooper, 9*). This perpetuated the situation where many Mijikenda were squatters together with ex-slaves on former plantations.¹⁰ Inland from the coastal plain the progress with land adjudication has been slow – among the slowest in the country (*Waaijbergen, 12*). Up to the present day, many people have no legal claim to the land on which they live and most likely have a family history of land dispossession. Many ownership claims to land are not secure and this means that no mortgages or development loans are given in the absence of title deeds.¹¹ Such farmers have little interest in agricultural investments or initiatives for long-term conservation and protection measures.

The tourist industry has also had its effects, driving up prices of so-called beach plots and other choice locations. The windfalls by some local owners in selling land to hotel consortia have profoundly distorted the land economy. Many people are eager to

occupy state-owned land for speculative purposes, with the hope of selling it for a much higher price. It is quite common that government land is allocated to local politicians or civil servants and almost immediately transferred to foreign or up-country interests.¹² For the less well connected, the way is to occupy land as squatters, which used to happen regularly with government-owned and parastatal land¹³ but nowadays private land is also being invaded.¹⁴ The national newspapers contain a daily litany of land conflicts in the Coast and elsewhere in the country. The fever of land speculation takes possession of landowners and non-owners alike. This so-called 'land-grabbing' depletes the treasury coffers of revenue but is also a form of unwarranted gain. These events have had a profound influence on the attitudes of local people: frustration because of effortless gains by others and because of feelings of dispossession since choice plots of land are being occupied by wealthy outsiders. At the same time, there exist unrealistic expectations of scarce opportunities and an insidious conviction that patronage and corruption decide economic and financial gain rather than training and dedication.

Regulation of land allocation and land sales needs to be improved. New owners of public land should not be allowed to sell within a prescribed period of time, say 10, 15 or 20 years. This will remove pressure on the heated land market. In fact, a regulatory body is already in place, the Land Control Board, but it is easily circumvented. At the same time, the policy expectations behind land settlement need to be

10 *Waaijbergen (12)* points out that these problems are restricted to certain parts of the coastal strip.

11 Although, by now, most banks have stopped accepting title deeds as collateral because of the many false and double ownership issues.

12 This was the case in 1998 in Lamu District where notables were allocated extensive beach front properties along the Tana River. This was subsequently reversed on presidential order (*Daily Nation 1998a*).

13 Most recently the Government Livestock Holding Ground on the Sabaki River near Malindi.

14 As, for example, in the case of a 1000-acre farm in Likoni resulting in court proceedings of the (Kikuyu) owners against the local Digo community (*Daily Nation 2000b*).

clear. *Hoorweg* (21) has pointed out that government policy has often been of two minds failing to distinguish between the need to settle landless people and the need to increase agricultural production. Where the objective is to settle people the expectations for agricultural production should not be high and in that case plot sizes can possibly be reduced, particularly when schemes are situated not far from urban centres with employment opportunities. Moreover, speculative tenants who do not effectively develop their allocated plots should have the land repossessed. This is legally possible, but is only occasionally implemented.

HUMAN CONSTRAINTS

In speculations about economic development in the region mention is usually made of geographical, climatic, historical and political constraints. But human constraints also play an important role, notably health, education, labour productivity and the attitudes and values of the indigenous population.

Levels of health and disease at the Kenya Coast are influenced by a number of factors associated with the poor health infrastructure, the tropical environment and poverty (*Boerma & Bennett, 18*). The level of health services does not differ from elsewhere in the country but the long distances make it difficult to maintain them. Services inland are poorer and farther apart than in the coastal strip. The level of education of mothers is low and this is one of the most powerful determinants of the quality of child care (*Mwadime 1996*). Coast Province has always had higher rates of child mortality than other parts of the country, although some recent findings indicate that some improvement has occurred. The tropical humid climate is a favourable environment for many tropical diseases. Malaria is the leading disease, but schistosomiasis, intestinal worm infections, and filariasis are also important public health problems. The

studies of *Latham* (1983a; 1983b) on adult workers in Kwale District revealed frequent parasitic infections along with undernutrition and anaemia. The effect of undernutrition on work capacity (and, by inference, study ability) is compounded by the effects of high ambient temperatures, sunlight and humidity. In recent years, there have been repeated outbreaks of cholera that are probably related to water supply and waste disposal, two major problems of public health. Efforts by the local authorities to provide cheap housing for the low-income groups have so far remained below expectations (*Macoloo, 22*).

Many households cannot feed themselves adequately while local diets lack quality and variety (*Klaver & Mwadime, 19*). Although seasonal problems can be met by food purchases to a large extent, this does not prevent many children from being undernourished. The nutritional status of coastal children is relatively poor and the Coast has the highest levels of stunting and wasting in the country.

As *Eisemon* (17) describes, it is ironic that the first efforts at introducing western education in Kenya were in Coast Province, as early as 1850. Since then, the Coast has been overtaken for two main reasons: firstly, the adherence to non-secular education and, secondly, neglect by central as well as local authorities during colonial and post-colonial times. At present, there is lack of educational facilities at secondary and tertiary levels. Attendance rates are below the national average.¹⁵ The performance of students in national examinations is below other parts of the country, something given regular prominence in the national press. The financial contributions of parents also continue to be a major impediment. The quality of teaching is poor, something which is self-perpetuating because the Coast is by now regarded a backwater and is not a popular destination

¹⁵ Nationally, the attendance rate for children, 10-14 years, is 86.5 but in Coast Province this is 74.9 (*Kenya 1996c: 27*)

for teaching staff.

The disadvantage in education is particularly evident among women. Recent information on literacy rates¹⁶ and school attendance¹⁷ confirm this. The reasons are the same as above compounded with inflexible gender relationships in respect of labour division and social responsibilities. The participation of women in wage employment at the coast is low with 17.4%.¹⁸ *Mitullab* (20), in the chapter on gender issues, focuses particularly on the Islamic culture with its strong segregation, particularly of upper-class women. According to her, women are restricted in all aspects of life, including education, domestic life, economic activities and political representation. Improvements in female education are particularly needed because they can bring about increases in labour opportunities, raise the age of marriage and result in improvements in child care. Consequently, it may also lead to improvements in social, economic and political participation of women.

Labour productivity was generally considered as low during the early years of colonial administration. The coastal people preferred village life to town life and social ties prevailed over work obligations. *Ikiara* (16) examines whether this was due to inherently negative attitudes of the workers or to poor and discriminatory terms of employment. He surmises that available records point to the latter. Worker conditions, especially in Mombasa, were difficult with low wages. Living conditions were characterised by poor health and sanitation. Housing problems were large-

ly ignored by government and employers until the series of labour unrest in the 1930s and 1940s (*Macoloo*, 22). But, according to *Cooper* (9), the workers of coastal origin remained at a disadvantage on the Mombasa labour market versus the influx of workers from up-country not only because of occupational factors and labour organisation but also because of social customs and cultural ties.

Coastal society has experienced a series of in-migrations over the centuries, starting with Shirazi and Arabs to the recent Italian pensioners and international tourists. Foreign residents and international tourists are blamed for a myriad of social problems (*Sindiga*, 15). Equally, the central government which is dominated by non-coastal interests is blamed for many political and economic woes. There is a widespread feeling of resentment among the indigenous people, of not being in control of one's destiny. As a result, Mijikenda and Swahili alike have a deep rooted suspicion of development initiatives and economic enterprises started by outsiders. On the other hand, if approached convincingly by their leaders, the local people are easily swayed into exploitative ventures for relatively little reward and often against their own long-term interests. This has led to a curious state of suspicion and apathy, on the one hand, and manipulation and exploitation, on the other. Yet, mostly a state of indifference prevails, in which neither economic opportunities are taken up nor strong forces are developed for change or, for example, resource conservation (Hoorweg 1998).

Generalisations about 'regional' or 'ethnic' character are no longer fashionable since it was realised that any variations between ethnic groups are usually smaller than the many differences between individuals within a social group. Yet, the temptation to do so is strong in the case of the coastal peoples. In the past, the indigenous population has been described as being generally of a mild and pleasant disposition but with lack of economic drive, negative attitudes

16 Literacy rates for all Kenya are 81% (men) and 66% (women). In Kwale, Kilifi and Tana River these figures are 66-38%, 69-35% and 62-37%, respectively (Kenya 1996c: 12).

17 The national rate of population, aged 10-14, that never attended school is 7.6% for boys and 8.9% for girls. Coast Province has the second highest rates: 14% for boys and 23% for girls (Kenya 1996c: 19).

18 Although not far from the national rate of 18.4% (Kenya 1996d: 32).

towards achievement and strong adherence to tradition and witchcraft. These are superficial observations but they reflect pervasive factors such as lack of self-confidence, feelings of helplessness, even feelings of victimisation that are, to some extent, understandable. The latter originate in a perceived history of slavery, domination by foreign groups and lately a central government with little coastal representation. By now, these grievances have come to be accepted as fact, but, in reality, act more as reverse stereotypes. For example, the extent of former slavery and its importance in the public imagination are not consistent with historical reality. The strong adherence to tradition is one way of maintaining (ethnic) identity in a complex and threatening world with a bewildering number of social and ethnic groups, and with witchcraft being a reflection of existing uncertainty about the self and enmity towards success that others achieve in these difficult circumstances.

This combustible mixture exploded in August 1997 during the communal violence in Likoni and Mombasa. *Wolf (10)* in his postscript argues convincingly that the violence against people from up-country origin was engineered for purposes of the coming general election. But once ignited the violence could not be stopped anymore because it dovetailed with the general resentment against the non-indigenous population. These events and their underlying causes have not yet run their course, they remain present below the surface of daily interaction between people. There is a state of uneasy truce between groups differing in religion, ethnicity and economic status. Frustrations and conflicts erupt regularly, be it in the form of legal proceedings, economic manipulation, political agitation or even as physical violence.

REGIONAL PRIORITIES

The Kenya Coast meets various criteria to be re-

garded as a separate entity – it is a region in a geographical, historical and socio-economic sense. Physical and economic resources have inherent potential; they can be developed in a regional context and the potential is greater than that of other disadvantaged parts of the country such as North-Eastern Province. There is need for a regional development policy and regional planning for which, currently, the administrative infrastructure is largely absent.

Wolf (10) points out that there is growing concern in Kenya over the concentration of power in the centre, in the context of an increasing ethnic orientation of politics and a declining legitimacy of the national leadership. There are repeated calls for a greater degree of regional autonomy, particularly for the Coast but also for other regions of the country. In the unlikely event that this were to happen – more coastal control of its own destiny – this might increase rather than lessen the potential for conflict among the highly heterogeneous population whether along racial, ethnic or class lines.

One of the consequences of current regional policies, notably the District Focus for Rural Development Policy, is that it has considerably weakened the provincial administration. The District Focus Policy, by itself, has not proven to be a great stimulus for the Coast as a region. Reasons for this are not clear but probably lie in the low levels of education that hamper grass-roots participation and the cumbersome hierarchy of development committees that initiatives have to pass through (Groothuis 1999). Also, the Coast is not popular among civil servants as a station or as a career step, although it is not clear whether this has an effect on their quality and input.

The Kenya Government has attempted to fill this void with the establishment of Regional Development Authorities. The role of these authorities, however, has not been clearly defined, many had insufficient financial means and generally they have had a chequered history. The Coast Development

Authority (CDA) was one of the last to be instituted, at a time when donors had largely lost interest in them. The regional authorities have been confronted with the dilemma of either focusing on project implementation which provides a source of income to keep the organisation going or on regional planning and management for which their political and financial means are insufficient.¹⁹

However, the case for a regional development policy is evident but it should not be sidelined by calls for regional autonomy or *majimbo* (Wolf, 10) although there is always that danger with local politicians seeking electoral gains. Regional development is concerned with physical, infrastructural as well as human resources and offers room for a wide range of development initiatives. It concerns economic growth but also the control and management of resources which is particular importance in this case. It also entails improvement of the quality of life which, in this case, requires active strengthening of the political and economic awareness of the local people. The case studies in this book on land settlement, housing, water development and dairy industry are examples of what can be achieved.

In the case of Coast Province, a regional development policy will necessarily focus on agriculture, tourism and the port of Mombasa with the ultimate aim to increase wage employment and to improve the quality of the labour force. Agriculture is a mainstay of the regional economy although food self-sufficiency will probably remain out of reach. The mostly small farmers and their associations need assistance with input supply, production technology and marketing of produce. Equally, the port and its development must have high priority. Port growth will require public investments in water supply and

19 In May 1999, a motion was passed in parliament to allow the CDA to develop revenue raising mechanisms for its activities (Daily Nation 1999). Which form this revenue will eventually take is currently a matter of discussion.

housing, more efficient road and rail connections with the hinterland and a generally enhanced efficiency and competitiveness. Similarly, serious efforts are needed to revitalise the tourist industry. Stakeholders need to increase co-ordination but the industry also needs restructuring in respect of backward linkages and the clientele targeted.

Growth of employment opportunities is of major importance because the local population is highly dependent on wages for its food security. There is need to open up opportunities for small-scale industry and promote rural enterprises close to the domestic resource base. This will require large investments in rural infrastructure and in the urban and rural informal sectors (Obudho 1992). In his contribution, *Masai (14)* lists a long series of measures needed to stimulate further industrialisation and rural industries, although there is often an environmental price to pay.²⁰ Other subjects that can be addressed at regional level are land tenure, water supply, education and agricultural marketing.

A the same time, it needs to be realised that many coastal and marine resources are threatened. Conservation and management of resources are of great urgency and the rich environment should be protected. Integrated coastal zone management could assure the sustainable use of coastal resources and halt the widespread destruction of natural resources (Clark 1996).²¹ This will require a major effort from the national government and international agencies in support of environmental organisations (Hoorweg 1997). But above all, there is need for awareness, concern and resistance by the local population to oppose the destruction of the natural riches.

20 For example, Kilifi District has to deal with a local cement factory with severe aerial emissions; a local calcium factory using mangrove wood for energy; and local sand mining which threatens the water table.

21 A first attempt at a management and action strategy was initiated in 1996 but only for a small area of heavy tourist concentration, north of Mombasa (ICAM 1996).

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