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# Rural housing conditions in Kisumu District, Kenya

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## INTRODUCTION

Housing conditions in Third World countries are usually investigated in the urban environment. Very few studies focus on the housing situation in the rural areas. This applies especially to the rural areas in the countries of sub-Saharan Africa. This lack of attention finds its origin in the seemingly better housing situation in the rural areas as compared to the urban slums and squatter settlements, in the narrow orientation on economic growth in most development policies with dominant attention for so-called modern production activities and consequent priority for urban areas, and in the disproportionate political influence of urban-based segments of the population.

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 Housing Research and Development Unit of the University of Nairobi. Due to inadequate resources, attention goes primarily to the urban areas. 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 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 Kisumu 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.

Housing conditions in Kisumu District differ under the impact of the variation in the natural environment; the organization of agricultural production and related degree of commercialization; income conditions; and policy measures by government organizations, private firms and joint ventures. The study of housing conditions in Kisumu District provides good opportunities for a comparison of the different circumstances under which housing becomes available to the rural population. There are clear differences between the sugar estates where housing is pro-

vided to regular employees, the settlement irrigation schemes where the National Irrigation Board provides houses on hire-purchase conditions, and the village areas where no direct external intervention in housing occurs. In addition, comparisons between the village areas can be made in relation to differences in population density, degree of agricultural commercialization and opportunities for off-farm income. It is this variety in circumstances within one and the same administrative framework which makes this study of rural housing conditions of particular interest.

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. The fourth chapter deals with the actual housing conditions and the factors responsible in the village areas on the one hand and in the irrigation schemes and on the estates on the other. 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.

## chapter one

### GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE KISUMU DISTRICT

#### 1. *Physical environment*

Kisumu District is one of the four districts of the Nyanza Province and covers a land area of 2093 sq.kms. (Republic of Kenya, 1980). It consists for the largest part of a flat river plain encompassed by escarpments in the north and south, and Lake Victoria in the west. There is no clear natural boundary in the east. The altitude varies between 1100 meters in the plains to 1500 meters in the higher parts of the north-east and the south.

The average rainfall varies between 600 and 2000 mm per annum and the variation coincides with differences in altitude. In the lower parts, precipitation fluctuates between 600 and 1100 mm, in the higher parts between 1200 and 2000 mm. These figures point at considerable differences between one year and the other and consequently effects agricultural output which is still largely determined by rainfall conditions in most parts of the district. This again influences the representativeness of income figures gathered in one particular year. In addition, there is an irregular distribution of rainfall over the year; although completely dry months are exceptional, half of the rain falls in the period March-May, while there is a second, although less pronounced, peak period during September-November.

For the district as a whole, the minimum temperature during the day varies between 18-25° C and the maximum varies between 25-30° C. Temperatures fluctuate according to altitude, but no altitude specific temperature data is given in the District Development Plan (Republic of Kenya, 1980). The nearness of Lake Victoria causes a high humidity of the air in most parts of the district.

These climatic conditions put a specific demand on housing design. According to "Design for Climate", (HRDU, 1975) the following building specifications should be taken into account:

- houses should be well isolated because of the relatively big differences between day and night temperatures. This implies walls made of heavy materials and painted in a light colour, the construction of a ceiling and thatched roofs.
- the rafts should be attached firmly to the walls because of the often strong winds.

The distinction between the lower and the higher parts of the district also applies to soils. In the Kano Plains and along the edge of Lake Victoria one finds the Black Cotton Soils, relatively fertile but hard to cultivate. These soils have a low permeability and particularly after heavy rainfall, tillage is almost impossible. In the higher parts brown volcanic soils are found, also fertile but much easier to cultivate. Since the higher parts show a more

regular pattern of rainfall distribution as well, they are more favourable for agriculture. The vast majority of the agricultural area is therefore classified as high potential land.

In order to exercise a higher degree of control over the natural environment, two national irrigation schemes have been established in the Kano Plains. In this way it is intended to achieve a more regular supply of water for cultivation, allowing for a change in the cropping pattern, easier methods of cultivation and higher levels of output. Soils of the district are a much used building material, but very little information is known as to their suitability for construction purposes. "Design for Climate" (HRDU, 1975) only states that the soil is less suitable as a foundation. If no lighter materials are used for the construction of walls, some improvements in order to strengthen the structures are considered necessary.

## 2. Administrative sub-division

Administratively, Kisumu District is divided into 4 divisions. Divisions consist of locations and these again of sub-locations. In addition, Kisumu Municipality is a separate administrative unit, which consists of 16 sub-locations and Kisumu Town. Other townships are included in the various sub-locations.

A sub-location usually has a varying number of settlement nuclei, which are known as villages. Particulars are given in the table below. (See also map 1)

Table 1

Administrative sub-division Kisumu District

Division	No. of locations	No. of sub-locations
Maseno	3	22
Winam	1	8
Muhoroni	4	12
Nyando	5	24
Total	13	66

Source: Population Census 1969; provisional data population census 1979.

The population of the Kisumu District amounted to 479,708 in 1979, of which 395,496 or 28% lived in the rural areas. Almost the whole population of the district consists of Luo. A comparison with the