

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

GJ-15  
Rural-Urban Migration

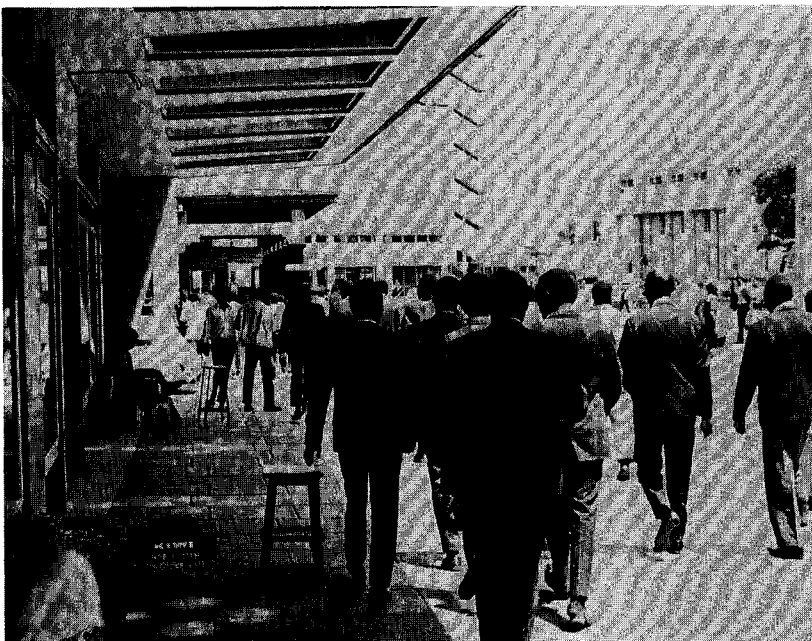
15 January 1972  
P.O. Box 4080,  
Dar es Salaam.

Mr. R. H. Nolte,  
Institute of Current World Affairs,  
535 Fifth Avenue,  
New York 10017.

Dear Mr. Nolte:

Each week in Kenya hundreds of young people -- school leavers mostly -- are departing the rural areas and making their way to the big city. Government officials who are beginning to see the rising social problems caused by this exodus are attempting to find ways of making the rural areas more attractive to these fleeing young people. Sections of the new Five Year Plan are devoted to this cause. The big question remains unanswered -- will there be sufficient financial support for these solutions.

After completing an informal interview with a small cross-section of young people throughout the Nairobi area, I have concluded that the attractions of the city are similar the world over. The adventures, the wide range of entertainment, the potential market for finding a companion or mate and the possibility of making the fast shilling are certainly attractive forces for any rural youngster --



The big city



Mixed feelings about the city



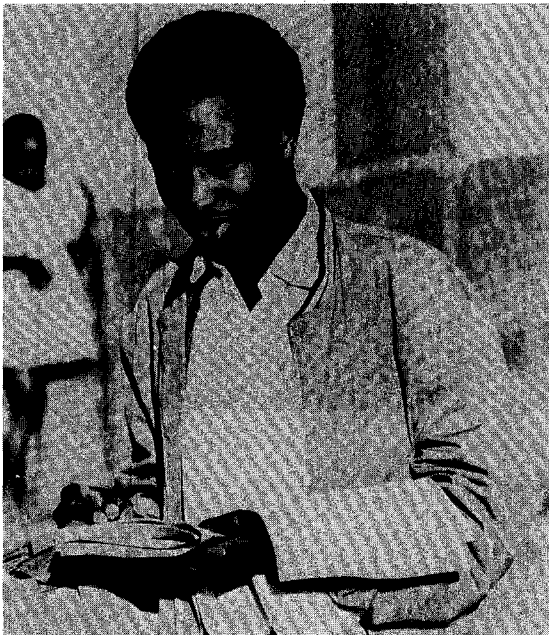
especially after he hears the story of the city as told by some of his more "seasoned" friends. In this newsletter I will present a composite of a series of questions asked of former rural dwellers who now reside in the city.

The total sample consisted of young men between the ages of 21 to 25 years. Each has had the trying experience of finding a job; however, unlike most of the 125,000 school leavers seeking jobs each year, they have found steady employment. Like their parents, none of these interviewees was born in the city. Although they have been away from their farms for an average of 5.3 years, they adamantly insist that they are not Nairobi residents. Their allegiance and ties remain with the family back home -- in spirit, if not physically. During many holidays, however, they ceremoniously leave the city and head for the farm -- some for varied reasons - all for a good home-cooked meal and a chance to fill their larders. When asked about the difference in the people with whom they come in contact at home and in the city, the most frequent answer is that people back home as a collective take a personal interest in their welfare, whereas in the city no one seems to care, that is, those people outside the living compound.

All of these young men reported that they would someday like to return to the farm. Many felt the city was moving at a pace far too rapid for them to join in; they all felt their wages to be sorely out of balance with the cost of living. Food, housing, clothing and occasional entertainment (cinema) consumed the bulk of their salary. Another sizeable portion is sent to the farm each month to help with on-going expenses and also to assist with the school fees of their younger sisters and brothers. Education is not free in Kenya: each family is responsible for fees, and clothing. In most cases when a youngster reaches the equivalent of our high school age he enters a boarding school which means additional expenses of room and board. The cycle in the city seems to be continual: one can never amass enough capital at any given time to return home financially secure.

Although most of them have been working for over five years, none of these young men have been able to accrue enough funds to buy and maintain an automobile. Public transportation such as the bus is used to get to work -- leisure-time travel is made by bicycle. The biggest luxury items are phonographs and transistor radios. These two items serve as focal points of recreation during non-working hours.

Two of the respondents, although voicing a desire to return, added a couple of qualifiers. Chris, a clerk with the City Council and Arthur, an apprentice draughtman who hopes to further his studies in the States someday,



asserted that the farm would have to provide more leisure time along with suitable activity. They also felt that governmental subsidy of wages below a minimum might not be a bad idea. This would guarantee farmers at least a subsistence level of income during periods of low yield.

Julius, a specialist in home-interviewing, is not as bothered by the long working hours as Chris and Arthur. He states that although the hours are long one has the satisfaction of ownership. "All the sweat that comes", smiled Julius, "goes for a good cause, me and my family". Julius then gave me a summary of a typical day on the farm. The day begins at 6 a.m. at which time the entire family sits down to a light breakfast of tea and porridge. (Tea usually means tea accompanied by buttered bread or biscuits (cookies). Shortly after breakfast while the women and young girls clear away the breakfast dishes and begin preparation for the next meal, the young boys and their older brothers help their father with the milking and the tending of the cattle. Once these sets of chores are completed, the entire family, with the exception of the old folks, moves to the fields. The division of labour is such that the men prepare the soil while the women do the planting and the weeding. The children, that is, those beyond the age of 6, are given the task of watching the cattle. The more privileged youngsters get a respite during the day as they hustle off to school. As soon



Some day we'll return to the farm -- A mechanized farm, that is.



as school ends for the day, however, they must rush home and complete the work cycle. Young nursing babies are usually found strapped to the backs of their mothers while they work in the field. When it is feeding time for baby the mother simply shifts its position to the front and continues her activity. The rocking motion and the up and down movements seem to be most enjoyable to these little tots. Very seldom does one hear cries of protest. When the field activity ends just before sunset the cows are again milked and fed. The evening meal, which takes a long time to prepare in comparison to the other meals, is the largest of the day. A typical meal would include ugali (similar to hominy grits) or irio (mixture of maize, beans, potatoes, and a green vegetable), vegetables, sweet potatoes, arrow-roots and fruit such as oranges, mangoes or bananas. After supper which most likely begins around 9 p.m. the family manages to visit with families in the area and talk local politics and then rush home for a good night's sleep in order to begin the routine again the next day. No matter how strenuous the work during the day one always finds willing neighbors at night at the local brew hall or village council. Talking groups are very much an institution in the lives of people in the rural areas. Sundays on the farm are markedly different and most enjoyable.

Sunday denotes, church, leisurely trips around the countryside and many hours of just talk with friends. On special occasions, some of the farmers ride into the city. On weekends one can see many bus loads motoring towards the urban regions. When riding the bus on weekends, one often sits amongst corn, beans, bananas and a few clucking chickens. The buses are usually filled to capacity both inside and outside. Bicycles, beds, charcoal and other bits of furniture are stored on roof racks. On many occasions one can see overturned buses which resulted from shifting passengers and an unbalanced load on top. As long as there are no casualties the passengers don't seem to get too upset but simply attempt to regroup their possessions and wait for assistance.

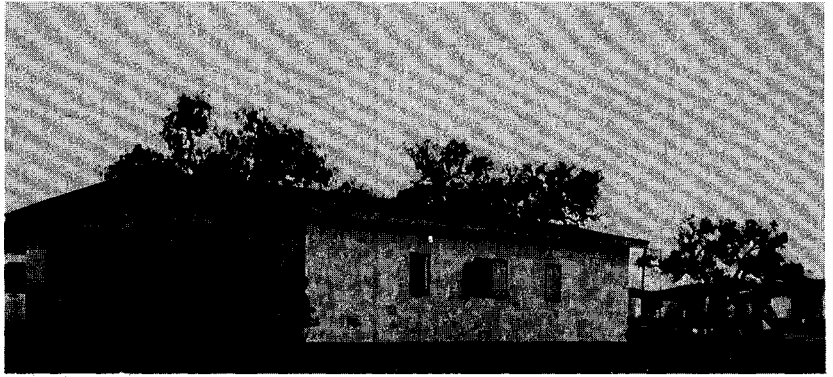
When one lives in the city, it is customary that at anytime one may get unexpected guests who may stay one or two days or one or two months. I have seen many friends answering the door to greet a family member who is standing outside with suitcases and bed. The more traditionalist hosts don't even raise an eyebrow. The aspiring and upwardly-mobile city resident although showing no outward sign to his guest becomes most annoyed when these visits are too frequent or too lengthy. It means quite a drain on savings since the host is usually responsible for all the needs of his guest.

Mike, a clerk with Public Works, reports that he shares a flat with a brother and two age-mates from his location; however, it is very seldom that one can find less than seven people at any time living in the flat. Many thoughtful guests will bring foodstuffs from home which somewhat eases the burden. The diet in the city is similar to that on the farm, but because of the tight budget, lunch and breakfast are omitted or are at best very light. Mike enjoys his diverse city schedule as compared to the routinized rural itinerary. Activity in the city begins at 6:15 a.m., when he washes and gets dressed for work. Washing up for Mike does not mean stumbling into a modern bathroom with all the conveniences, but going outside to a semi-private toilet facility which becomes most uncomfortable during the rainy season or when a neighbor's sanitation habits fall below their normal standards. As his job requires him to come in contact with the public, Mike is most fastidious in hygiene and dress. After toileting for a considerable time, or getting "smart" as he terms it, Mike has just enough time for a sip of tea before he dashes out the door for the bus station. On some of his more hurried days, Mike finishes "taking breakfast" by munching on a buttered piece of bread while jogging to the bus stop. Although his workday at the office begins at 8:15 a.m. the erratic bus schedule and the frequent overcrowded conditions cause him to be very wary of cutting the time too thin. He has not been late since he began three years ago.

The morning at the office ends at 12:45 when everyone departs for lunch. Lunch is more of a chance for social activity than a time to consume food. Workers usually get together with friends and discuss



Sometimes I long for the  
carefree life with the  
animals



A Typical dwelling



The Morning rush



Solitude

politics or the upcoming football (soccer) match. Depending on the time of the month the noon meal might consist of a coke or half-pint of milk with a samosa (ground meat wrapped in a thin pastry crust) or a sugared bun. Window shopping or watching a daily checker match in the park are other activities which use up the 75-minute lunch hour. Age-mates can be seen in groups meandering around town holding hands. At first I was a little surprised by the hand-holding of males, but once I became more familiar with East African traditions and culture I soon realized that this gesture is simply a sign of easy comradeship.

At 2 p.m. the work-day continues. Most governmental offices are open until 4:30 p.m., at which time the rush to the bus station begins. Everyone vies to be the first in line in order to be sure of seat. The unbelievably long queues, the jostling, the loud shouts and the frequent altercations are but short scenarios in the lives of the urban dwellers. It seems to be a time when the tensions of the day are released.

"The early evening is a time when the day's washing and ironing of clothes begins," Mike reports. Because of a sparse wardrobe it is necessary to wash and iron each evening to ensure clean clothes on a daily basis. After this evening chore which takes up to two hours, one is free to move around and visit friends or most likely to go and shop for the evening meal. Lacking his own refrigeration, food storage presents a problem for the average wage earner, so the day by day shopping becomes a necessity.

At the end of the month on pay day the evening may include a movie, a dance or a trip to the local tavern. Beer is the most popular drink in East Africa. Most Africans prefer to have their beer served by the liter and warm.

In addition to more varied social activities, Sam, an apprentice accountant, related that the city offered much more in the way of intellectual stimuli than the rural areas. "Most of our parents" he said,



"completed their formal education at Standard IV (4th grade), whereas most of my friends and age-mates have completed Form IV (High School graduation)." He concluded that such a disparity leads to problems of communication with the older people once you moved beyond polite conversation. He also added that the majority of the schools in the rural areas concentrated more on the "academics" rather than those subjects which would assist them in agriculture. Most of their subjects which are "white collar" oriented include : Math, English, Geography, History, Religion, Music, General Science, Swahili, French, Health Science and Biology. "The government," he continued, "has finally awakened to the educational needs of the rural areas and are now insisting that subjects such as advanced farming techniques, animal husbandry, masonry, carpentry, plumbing and other technical subjects be added to the curriculum." It will take some time before the full range of technical subjects is offered, but the gradual phasing-in has been a welcome relief to the majority of the rural citizenry.

This broader education in the long run will have an impact on the unemployment in that it will not only make the farm more relevant and modern, but will also give the school leavers more of a bargaining power in terms of job skills. The majority of the respondents (95%) classified employment and housing as the most pressing problems they have encountered in the city.

Most of the housing for the average income family in Nairobi consists of one or two rooms (10' x 14') partitioned by a series of curtains in order to maintain some degree of privacy. There are often as many as 10 people living in such a structure at any given time. Frequently, a family will have a young school age relative living with them. They are usually boarded and sent to school in payment for baby-sitting and being partially responsible for meal preparation. Although most of these youngsters are put through a gruelling daily schedule, the desire to get an education gives them the incentive to cope. Because the rooms are congested, most of the activity (cooking, washing, and eating) of the family takes place in an outside courtyard. Pursuing the topic of congestion I was invited

by Peter, a sales clerk for a local company, to visit some of the new housing schemes currently being constructed by the government, which hopefully, will not only give housing relief, but will also increase living-room space through practical architectural designs. (Upon visiting a few of these schemes, I was impressed by the modern designs, the wise use of space and the emphasis placed on family privacy).

As I turned to other questions with the respondents the topic of education kept reappearing. At one point I asked, "What advice will you give your children in order for them to be successful in life?" and again the answer, "Get as much education as possible." They would also advise their children to go for the top jobs and invest in land.

Unlike their fathers and grandfathers, these young men felt they would be satisfied with just one wife. They also felt it best to wait until age 28 before considering marriage. Dating for most began at age 16. One chap reported, "I was only 15 when the first girl dated me." As for the number of children desired, the numbers ranged from 3 to 10 with an average of 5.3. From the information given me, the size of their present families fluctuated from 4 - 11 siblings with an average of 7.2.

Most of these respondents were at first reluctant to attempt a prediction of their future. Finally, their expressed desire to own a shamba (farm) in the country and a business of some type in the city, seemed like a passing fancy. As they began, however, detailing the economic trends of the country and the drive towards Africanization of the business sector their ambitions had a lot of merit. They not only saw themselves as a part of this new transformation but also felt a sense of traditionalism which compelled them to maintain ties with the land.

As a final and parting question, I asked what individual in the world had most influenced their lives and their ambitions. The unanimous answer was Mzee Jomo Kenyatta, the President of Kenya.

*Sincerely,*  
*George Jones*

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Received in New York on February 4, 1972.