

## INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

IMW-21  
African Agriculture:  
Trends and Development

The Highlands Hotel  
Molo, Kenya  
May 26, 1962

Mr. Richard H. Nolte  
Institute of Current World Affairs  
366 Madison Avenue  
New York 17, New York

Dear Mr. Nolte:

Eight years ago Kenya was in a mess. The perverted form of tribalism, especially among the Kikuyu, that was Mau Mau had shocked the Government into the realization that Kenya's Africans had some genuine grievances. In an attempt to remedy these and provide employment for those dislocated by the Emergency, the Assistant Director of Agriculture, Roger Swynnerton, devised a five-year plan to intensify agricultural development in all African land units. His recommendations were accepted by the Government and today, eight years later, agricultural development continues on the lines he suggested. The Swynnerton Report was the turning point, and it laid the foundations for the continued growth of an African cash crop economy in Kenya.

Essentially the Report called for the development of a sound and intensive system of farming in order to increase production without adding greatly to the area under cultivation. He exploded the commonly held belief, held by some even today, that there are still large, unoccupied but highly productive areas in Kenya ripe for settlement. Instead he emphasized that the surest way of improving the lot of the Kenya African, as well as that of the economy as a whole, was through further irrigation schemes (see IMW-19), land consolidation (see IMW-20), improved livestock, more and better-trained staff for planned farming, further agricultural loans, and most important, through developing African cash crops with sound agricultural practices. In this way Swynnerton felt that the surplus output of each farming family could be raised from \$28 to \$280 per annum, an impressive goal for East Africa.

During the past eight years there has been tremendous development. On our recent trip in Central Province we had a chance to see for ourselves, talk with DAOs (District Agricultural Officers) and visit some of the new farms. Here, therefore, we will deal mainly with the Central Province, but occasionally other areas will be mentioned. Although we were impressed (it is the most advanced province in Kenya---see Table II), we were constantly reminded that much of the development we saw could be erased in a very short time if the complicated system of supervision, run by the co-operatives, the Agriculture Department and local governments, were allowed to falter, or if the farmers lost faith in their advice for one of any number of reasons such as a severe drop in the price of coffee.

In Central Province the three most important cash crops are

coffee, pyrethrum (an insect killer) and tea, in that order. We were told time and time again by DAOs that all three crops depend on high quality to find a place on the market and that therefore a high degree of supervision is required to ensure that all farmers practice proper methods of cultivation. Since the processing of these crops requires large bulk and since African producers tend to grow relatively small amounts, the whole crop from an area will be processed together at the same factory. As a result, one bad farmer can lower the quality of the group, and so some control has to be exercised.

This is done mainly through the co-operatives, although they are backed up by the law. The co-operatives of Central Province, especially those dealing with the important money-earners, have often been founded by Government officials and then later turned over to local control once a workable system has been established. These co-operatives tend to be relatively powerful local organizations, while those dealing with smaller, less remunerative crops appear to be somewhat shaky. In Meru District, out of a total of 51 co-operative societies only 21 are operative and the rest are in some stage of liquidation. This can only be attributed to the fact that the co-operative idea hasn't really caught on. Most of the liquidations occur when members sell outside the co-operative, often believing they get a better bargain but in fact rarely doing so.

By far the most efficient way of maintaining a consistently high quality in coffee, pyrethrum and tea production is by control at the factory rather than on the shamba (farm). Both ways are used, however. Assistant Agricultural Officers visit as many farms as they can to make sure the various rules are followed as well as to make

#### Picking tea.



suggestions for better farming. But control at the factory is much easier, quicker and more effective. If a farmer brings in unripe coffee berries, more than the bud and two tea leaves, or over-ripe pyrethrum flowers (very much like daisies), they are rejected, and so the farmers soon learn to follow the rules. It is for this reason that African producers have consistently higher quality than their European counterparts. If a hired worker on a European coffee estate brings in unripe berries, the owner either throws them away (and loses everything) or he includes them and

lowers his overall quality. Obviously he includes them, while the self-employed African leaves the coffee berries on the bush until they are ready.

Together these three main crops produce annual exports worth about \$50 million of which coffee accounts for \$30 million, tea for \$12 million, and pyrethrum for \$8 million. As far as African production goes, each is a relatively new crop. Until a few years ago none of them were encouraged, and for several reasons. Pyrethrum only recently became an important money-earner. In the case of coffee and tea, European growers didn't want competition from Africans, and they also firmly believed that an African crop would be inferior and harm Kenya's overseas reputation for top quality. It is widely stated that Africans were not allowed to grow these crops until recently. We asked Jack Benson, Economic Advisor of the Meru African Coffee Co-operative Union, if this was so:



Two leaves and the bud only!

"Emphatically no! It is true Africans weren't encouraged to plant coffee in Meru and that a ceiling was placed on the number of trees each could have, but no one paid any attention to that. We even had an African coffee pulper here in 1941. Only in the lower unproductive areas was coffee growing prohibited, and that was because until recently we haven't had a variety which would grow down there. Today they can grow coffee anywhere, but the quality from the lower areas is appalling. It's a vindication of our past policy, because it would have been unsalable before the new varieties were developed. As a matter of fact I've just been told that some of the low country growers say we've put a curse on their coffee so it won't be any good. This pretty much proves our point. Anyway, this was all changed around 1947, and now we are encouraging coffee everywhere.

"Some people have claimed our past policy impeded African economic development, and that had they been allowed to grow coffee before they would be considerably further advanced now. I think this just isn't true. We couldn't encourage the crop until we could produce high quality coffee that would sell at competitive prices. Otherwise in the long run we would do more harm than good.

"Today the coffee cess charged by the African District Council

and collected by MACCU brings in no less than \$112,000 a year. This goes towards education, health clinics and roads, among other things. We might not have this at all had we lost the growers' confidence at an early stage."

The development of these three crops in African areas continues apace. There are other important crops in Central Province too, however. Miraa is one of the more exotic of them. When one chews the bark from a fresh branch within 48 hours of its cutting, he gets a feeling of exhilaration somewhere between tobacco and marihuana. Europeans we know who have tasted it think it is terrible, "over-rated" they say, but they're crazy about it in Aden whence it is shipped regularly by air. Grown only in Meru District, the 1961 crop was valued at \$185,000.

Cassava is another important food crop. Although most of the Africans in Central Province don't like to eat it, it is encouraged as a famine reserve since it grows under adverse conditions. Some has been planted throughout the Province, but many Africans still prefer to grow none and fall back on the famine relief maize, often free, which they know will come when they need it.

The full benefits of increased production and higher quality can only be realized by farmers if their produce is efficiently marketed. Special Boards control the coffee, pyrethrum and tea crops, and the Central Province Marketing Board performs this service for the rest. In the past the process was pretty much hit and miss (except with the big money-earners, of course), but today before most crops are even planted the Board publishes the probable buying prices for each commodity handled, and they are confirmed before harvesting. Thus farmers are able to plant crops knowing that their total production can be sold at a guaranteed price.

The production and quality of livestock throughout Central Province is steadily improving. The rapid introduction of high-grade cattle in some districts is actually giving concern for the adequate maintenance of veterinary services if the industry is to grow. The production of dairy produce is growing so quickly it is outpacing the demand, although the potential market has hardly been touched. In several areas there are sizable daily milk surpluses, and the Government is working hard to encourage milk drinking. Near Nyeri the first people to suffer from this situation are the European farmers. We talked to one whose contract to sell a certain number of gallons daily to the Milk Board had recently been cancelled. "Today everyone wants to buy from the African if he has it to sell. I'll have to sell my milk to make cheese, although I won't get as much for it."

Sheep, goats, pigs and poultry are all growing in popularity. Each district has its model farmers, but unfortunately many of the rest have very low standards of management, and a relatively high proportion of the better breeds of sheep will probably die as a result.

Much of this development naturally rests on the research services provided by the Government and on agricultural education, both

for farmers and for Departmental staff. There are numerous research stations throughout Kenya dealing with almost everything imaginable. The Horticultural Research Station at Molo is trying to find the greatest yielders, from different varieties of artichokes to dioscorea, a potentially valuable crop as a source of cortisone for oral contraceptives. The Research Station at Embu has found the best way to start a rotation is with potatoes and ten tons per acre of F.Y.M. (farm yard manure).

There is still the necessity to bridge the gap between the results from the various research stations and the application of the findings to the field. In Central Province it is the aim to make the Farmers' Training Centres the hub around which agricultural progress turns. The oldest one, Wambugu which is near Nyeri, offers a two-week training course for a fee of \$2.80. Last year 357 men and 257 women received training at the Centre. There are four other similar Centres and a farm giving instruction in tea culture in Central Province. Refresher courses for Departmental staff are also available either at these Centres or in the field.

The Agricultural Training School at Embu offers a certificate in agricultural training for those who wish to become agricultural instructors. Embu graduates used to be criticized for their lack of practical ability, but a new Principal has placed the students in selected progressive farms nearby. The farmers like the help, and it is said the students thereby have gained a wealth of practical experience.

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In Kenya politics dominates every aspect of life, and so it is not surprising that it also remains the crucial factor in any further agricultural development. Inevitably in our discussions with DAOs and administrative officers, politics, army worm, and the weather were the major causes hindering advance. The uncertainties affecting the future of the country have been felt in all districts and by all Departmental staff. This has sometimes resulted in work standards falling and a lack of discipline, especially amongst the junior staff.

In some districts there has been a marked deterioration in quality, particularly of cash crops. One DAO told us that the most depressing feature of the year was that in the coffee cooperative either the primary societies were unable to influence their members or else there was a deliberate policy on the part of these responsible to ignore all advice given in the interest of the growers and the industry in general.

This is not an isolated example. Elsewhere, through neglect of soil conservation measures, there is a grave risk of the land reverting to its original state, and the initiation of enclosure or consolidation may be too late to prevent this. The Department feels that greater efforts must be made to bring home the seriousness of the situation and to secure the co-operation of the people.

Since progress means change, it often meets with opposition. Occasionally irresponsible politicians may take advantage of this for their own personal gain, and there is ample evidence that this is just what is happening in Central Province and throughout Kenya. Responsible politicians have little with which to fight this kind of rabble-rousing, at least under the present circumstances.

It is difficult to pinpoint blame for such things solely on some politicians and their irresponsible statements, but no doubt there is a correlation. In general, as the District Commissioner of Meru told us, "Economic development continues to be held up by the lack of political stability which is all that is required to ensure the development of a vast potential."

At present it doesn't look as if Kenya will have that stability for some time.

Sincerely yours,



Ian Michael Wright

Received New York June 22, 1962

Table I: Total agricultural exports from Kenya, African and European (in £).

1961	30,717,239
1960	31,394,553
1959	29,778,773
1958	26,418,528
1939	3,228,282

Table II: Selected marketed products from the African areas of Central Province.

	<u>unit</u>	<u>quantity</u>	<u>value (in £)</u>
<b>Produce:</b>			
coffee	tons	6,064	2,208,927
fruit and vegetables	tons	14,633	246,827
maize	200 lbs.	200,009	285,012
miraa	bundles	219,600	65,880
pyrethrum	tons	763	142,956
rice	160 lbs.	149,998	239,996
tea	112 lbs.	2,800	62,397
tobacco (flue-cured)	lb.	13,106	1,346
tobacco (native)	lb.	387,507	13,126
<b>Livestock Products:</b>			
eggs	doz.	60,105	8,167
hides	no.	98,686	74,015
skins	no.	274,127	55,202
milk and cream	gal.	205,156	22,294
pigs	head	628	5,684
poultry	no.	32,233	7,255
	TOTAL	1961	4,038,057
	TOTAL	1960	3,433,302

Table III: Total of all marketed products from African areas in Kenya.

1961	9,362,611
1960	8,265,969