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Nyamira district, Kenya

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Smallholder Tea Production and Livelihood in Nyamira District, Kenya

Edward Ontita*

Introduction

Kenya is the third largest tea producer globally after India and Sri Lanka, the second largest tea exporter after Sri Lanka (Nyangito, 2000) and 60% of that produce comes from smallholder farmers (Odhiambo, Nyangito and Nzuma, 2004). In Nyamira District, tea is a key resource in the hands of rural people. In this article an important dimension of the interest and spread of tea husbandry among smallholder producers namely, migrant labour is discussed. The article also deals with the manner in which tea as a resource is moulded by actors in order to earn a living in consonance with local circumstances, and emerging contests over it, related resources and their meanings.

A key argument in this article is that widespread adoption of cash crops such as tea in rural areas does not imply prosperity, educated children and success in rural life as argued in some of the literature (such as Bates, 1989: 55). Bates takes the view that cash crops had brought prosperity to the highlands of Kenya, arguing that those who had planted cash crops enjoyed higher incomes and better lives. In the same vein, Sachs (2005: 52–55) argues that cash cropping is one important pathway to higher family incomes and thus a useful ladder out of poverty. He stretches the argument to imply that cash crop production lifts subsistence farmers to the market and subsequently instils disciplined specialisation that brings about successful livelihoods. Reality in the study areas does not tally with the arguments of these and other economists. Rather

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the results are mixed for different reasons which are explored in this article.

The origins of tea growing beyond Kenya's former 'White Highlands' where colonial settlers had developed the crop in large scale is hardly debated. It is assumed rather axiomatically that after the colonial government allowed African smallholders to cultivate the crop and especially after the Swynnerton Plan on African Agriculture was promulgated in 1955, the national extension service spread tea growing to smallholders in all suitable districts (cf. Nyangito, 2000: 14). Evidence from field work in Nyamira District appears to contradict attribution of beginnings of tea growing in the district to the extension service. It appears that some tea growing at least on a trial basis preceded tea extension in the district.

Tea is an important cash crop in Kenya's economy. This centrality is hinged on its value as an export crop as well as the ease with which it has been adopted by small holder farmers. Adoption by small holder farmers has led to the penetration of the crop deep into rural areas where land is scarce and continually subdivided. The government has supported the set up of tea factories to support small holder tea production through a statutory body, the Kenya Tea Development Agency (KTDA). KTDA installs and manages tea factories on behalf of small holder tea farmers registered under each factory that it develops.

The government has maintained interest in the crop over the years for a variety of reasons. Key among these is that tea is a significant export crop and thus a considerable foreign exchange earner for the country. Besides, tea is crucial in rural development as it provides rare employment opportunities on the smallholder farms as well as in the tea factories. Overall the multiplier effect of small holder tea production in rural areas is great in sectors such as education, housing, small business and a variety of informal sector activities.

In the study area of Sengereri Village, Nyamira District, tea is the single most important crop. Agriculture is the mainstay of this rural economy and tea is the core of that sector. While the district mainly constitutes agro-ecologically medium to high potential land, that land is scarce and getting even more scarce

over time as subdivision occur for purposes of inheritance. Even as land sizes per family decline toward uneconomic holdings, tea growing appears common to most land holders in the district.

The main reason advanced for tea growing by majority of the people in the district is that it fetches income monthly and perennially. Additionally other historically important cash crops such as coffee and pyrethrum have suffered marketing problems over the years to the extent that the latter was abandoned in the early 1980s and the former is increasingly shunned by most farmers in the district. The importance of tea in the local economy can therefore not be gainsaid.

The article is based on ethnographic accounts collected at Sengereri Village, Nyamira District, Kenya in 2004 and 2005. The ethnographic data are supplemented with more data from a survey in the same village which was conducted in September 2005. The aim of the fieldwork activities was to bring out livelihood organisation among actors in the village and to particularly examine the evolution of and meanings attributed to tea as a resource for livelihood construction, the contests over those meanings and uses, as well as how the actors mould tea to earn a living. The discussion also attempts to explain actors' perspectives of livelihood success and failure in the village.

1. Smallholder Tea Growing in Nyamira District, Kenya

According to Mandi (1971) and Otieno (2002) tea is believed to have originated in the South East Asia where it has been cultivated for many centuries. It was from there that it was dispersed to other countries. Mandi (*ibid.*) further argued that tea was first introduced to African soil at Durban, South Africa in the 1850s. However, he adds that in Africa tea has survived longest in Malawi where it was introduced with hitches in 1878 and finally with triumph in 1891.

In Kenya, there seems to be a general consensus in the literature that tea was first planted at Limuru, Kiambu District about forty kilometres east of the capital city Nairobi in 1903 (see

Mandi, 1971; Kenyanchui, 1992; Kenya, 1999; Otieno, 2002 and Omosa, 2003; 2004) by British settler G.W.L. Cane who had also planted it earlier in Manipur, India (Kenyanchui, 1992: 120). From Limuru tea spread to other climatically suitable districts on commercial bases during the 1920s. This dispersal of the crop was essentially with regard to plantation production by the colonial white settler farmers.

It was in 1952 that tea was introduced to African areas in Kirinyaga and Kericho Districts on an experimental basis and in 1957 a tea factory was constructed in Kirinyaga District to process green leaf from African smallholder farmers. By 1959, African smallholder tea production was under the statutory management of the Special Crops Development Authority which was transformed into Kenya Tea Development Authority (KTDA) in 1960 (Mandi, 1971). These developments appear to have followed closely from the promulgation of the Swynnerton Plan (Swynnerton, 1954) on the Intensification of African Agriculture in 1955 which recommended organised state support and investment in African Agriculture (cf. Talbott, 1992: 86).

Although the Troup Report (1953) and the Swynnerton Plan (1955) spurred agricultural extension in African areas across the country, relations between African farmers and extension officers were severely strained during the period after World War Two for brutally enforcing soil conservation ventures and carrying out merciless livestock culling (see Brown, 1968: 80). Brown (*ibid.*, 37) has further shown that despite increased technical support to African farmers, high value cash cropping was not allowed all over the country during the period 1955–1960. Surprising however, and in spite of a chequered extension service in African areas; according to Uchendu and Anthony (1969) and Garst (1972) by the 1950s such new crops as maize, tea, coffee and pyrethrum among others had been widely adopted in Gusiiland of which, Nyamira District was a part.

Conventional explanations for the widespread uptake of new high value cash crops particularly tea in Gusiiland centre on the aggressive extension work by the Special Crops Development Authority and its 1960 successor, the KTDA (cf. Nyangito, 2000: 13). Zeleza (1989a, b) reinforces this argument indicating that African farmers were required to plant new crops particularly corn

whose surplus was required by Europeans especially during the two world wars. It may be added that tea growing in African areas was spurred further by economic conditions during the depression in the 1930s and the collapse of international tea production quota agreements after the World War Two (cf. Talbott, 2002). A specific reason offered by Levine and Levine (1966) is that a rapidly increasing population, the introduction of new crops and the possibility of obtaining cash through agriculture turned the primary economic attention of the Abagusii away from cattle to their extremely fertile soil.

Such explanations are structural and externally deterministic, ignoring the possibility of actors' appropriation of and struggles or negotiation with and around the external forces. In seeking a more balanced explanation for the relatively quick uptake of tea by the Abagusii, an actors' perspective is emphasised with a view to locating the socio-culturally embedded genesis and growth of smallholder tea production and its place in their livelihoods over time and space (cf. Long, 2001).

2. Tea: locating a resource in the hands of villagers

One of the villagers that I interacted with regularly, visited severally and interviewed is Patroba, a tall sticky man in his late 70s but looking younger with an upright walk, no walking stick and scarcely grey hair. Patroba is representative of villagers who commenced their lives by going to work in the 'White Highlands' at an early age, coming back with tea husbandry skills and an interest in the crop and ultimately establishing the crop in their farms. This type of farmers was the earliest to grow tea in the village and they helped others accept or access tea growing. Some of these farmers expanded tea growing in a variety of ways and went into other businesses as well as educating their children and leading successful lives while others stumbled by the wayside and led not so successful lives; all that for a variety of reasons some of which this article explores.

Patroba was born in 1927 in a polygamous family. He has an elder sister Nyakang'i born in 1923 as well as younger brothers

Ongeri and Sauri, followed by sister Nyaboke, Ogake and the last born brother, Basweti. He also has a number of step brothers and sisters. His father Nyamboga Masa was a herder, but the family was generally poor. Patroba was circumcised at the age of 15. Like other young men in his village he toyed with the idea of raising his own resources to commence life. Many young men were being recruited to work in the then White Highlands. He went to Kericho because he heard that there was work there.

He went there with Mzee Okonu, his neighbour who also wanted to work. Okonu was older and more informed about work in the tea plantations. He lived in Okonu's house for about five months and then moved to live on his own after acquiring household items. A small round hut was provided to him by the plantation management when he had bought the household items. Patroba worked in the Kericho tea estates plucking tea between 1942 and 1947. His salary then was three shillings per month and hardly saved any money for future use except for buying a small transistor radio which made him an enigma in the village and earned him many visitors to his little grass thatched house who came to listen to the radio whenever cells were available. Patroba said that it was while working in the tea plantations that he came to appreciate how easy it was to tender the tea crop. He thus developed an interest and aspiration to own his own tea crop in the future.

After working in Kericho for six years, he came back home and started school at age 21 in 1948 at Tombe. Because he had not saved much money thus far and his family did not see the value of school at the time, Patroba raised his school fees of nine shillings per year by growing maize which he sold. He sat for his Common Entrance Examination (CEE) in 1954 and passed. After primary school he was employed as a temporary teacher in Kitutu Chache in a school called Nyasore. He worked as a teacher for two years (1956–1958) and left the job because the salary was too low at Ksh 100 per month, from which he returned a tithing of Ksh 10 every month, to the Seventh Day Adventist church.

Patroba had become a Seventh Day Adventist in 1950 and was baptised the same year. He wedded his wife Yunuke Obonyo the same year. Bride price for her was from his sister Ogake's bride price which was six cows, a bull and a goat. The wedding expenses

were low because they walked to the lady's home and to church as well as back to his home. In 1951, they got their first-born child, a son Okioro. Okioro dropped out of school in form four and is married with a number of children. Formerly he used to practice lumbering for a living but is now a farmer. His father occasionally assists him in paying school fees for his children. Peris, Lydia, Ongaki, Simon, Joyce, Jane, Reuben, Monica, Damaris and Grace are Patroba's other children.

In 1960 he joined Tombe Pyrethrum Cooperative Society as Treasurer and later as Store Keeper. Here the salary was 170 shillings per month. During that time he saved 500 shillings with which he bought an exotic dairy cow. The cow used to produce two gallons of milk per day, but it died after only two years. The cooperative society dealt mainly in pyrethrum collection from smallholders and its sale to the Pyrethrum Board of Kenya for export.

In 1961 he planted tea after soil from his father's farm was examined and permission to plant granted from Kericho's Tea Research Foundation. The tea seedlings were given to him from Kericho on credit and he paid up after harvesting and selling the green tea leaves. He started by planting 1000 seedlings and gradually increased to 3000 bushes.

In order to receive tea seedlings in the 1960s, he prepared a seed bed complete with '*egesa*' (shade) and officers from Kericho and Sotik could come with tea budding early in the mornings and planted the tea in there. With time, people learnt that it was easy to do the same as it meant cutting the tea budding (a mature leaf and a bud and planting them in the polythene bags filled with red soil in the *egesa*). This process was new and took time requiring a lot of people to accomplish, but Patroba said that he had already seen it all at Kericho tea plantations when he worked there in the 1940s and that helped him manage his process and those of his relatives with ease.

Patroba explained that tea planting was a tedious and labour intensive affair. His father was helpful in prevailing on his mother, younger brothers and sisters to help him continually on the farm. Besides, his parents also summoned their work group which was organised around their lineage and clan to help Patroba plant the

tea. He said that although he was married at the time, only his father as head of the larger family would legitimately mobilise *risaga* (a work group) or *ekebosano* (a one time task oriented work group) organised around food and drink at the end of the working day, to help in tea planting. Through this work groups many people in the village and beyond especially his relatives learnt of and took up tea growing with his assistance. His wife helped with mobilising other women to prepare food for working groups involved in '*ekebosano*' to plant tea.

In 1968, the family sub-divided their father's farm. In the sub-division, his brother Basweti got 900 bushes and his father 400 bushes while Patroba remained with 1800 bushes. This sub-division of his father's land effectively provided inheritance of the land and focused Patroba's farming and other development activities on his own land. Having given some of his tea to his brother and some to his father, he started looking inwards to his family and personal development.

In 1969 he bought land at Eranda about two kilometres from his home for 1600 shillings. This money was from his tea and pyrethrum earnings as well as from a bank loan. He planted 1600 tea bushes on the land and later increased it to 3000 tea bushes. In 1999 the bushes started drying up. He decided to uproot all of it and replant a better variety. He used seedlings from his own tea nursery and has planted 500 seedlings from it. Besides, he sold 300 seedlings at five shillings each to raise school fees for his last born child. Patroba has educated all his children mainly using tea earnings.

Patroba has a well in his compound that supplies water for his personal use and to his neighbours. Though some of his neighbours have wells too, theirs are not as deep as his and so during the dry spell theirs dry up early and Patroba's well remains an only source of water for most of them. They usually use the water to give their livestock, for laundering and other needs. His brother's children like Ndiege, Nyamesa, Basweti and other neighbours Thomas Obaigwa and Sauri are regular users of his well. He had constructed the well in the 1980s using his income from tea.

Patroba's wife is bedridden with diabetes. He said that his own health was failing; he only weeds his tea and does not pluck regularly. He has employed some people like his daughter-in-law Milka and his neighbour Ombongi's two daughters-in-law, Mary and Sylviah whom he pays four shillings per kilogram of tea leaf plucked and delivered to the tea buying centre. He however weeds for his tea on his own especially in the mornings before it gets hot. He told me that he had selected the three ladies whom he described as trustworthy to pluck his tea in order to control quality of tea leaf plucked and to be sure that his crop is not stolen on the way to the buying centre. He explained that these workers treated his farm as their own counting days and starting to pluck on their own when the time came without him going to prompt them. He provided them with breakfast every day they worked for him and lunch if they returned to find his family having it.

The workers told us that some of Patroba's children usually visit them in their homes with gifts such as sugar or cooking oil to thank them for supporting their father on the farm. They said they felt as part of the Patroba family because of his generosity together with his children. They said that sometimes they help with taking maize for Patroba's family to the posho mill when there is nobody to take. This they do as their good gesture without asking for pay. When the Patrobas have visitors and need extra hands in food preparation they said that they helped without expecting to be paid, but many times received tokens from the family.

Patroba's wife used to help in tending the tea crop as well as growing food crops before she got sick. Patroba said that his children were very helpful in the farm when they were young and lived with him. Now that most of them have their own homes, he does most of the work on his own. He recently sold three blue gum trees to Simion Mosomi who supplies firewood to Tombe Tea Factory. He sold the three trees to him for Ksh 1500. He also sold three cypress trees to Kennedy Ongeru to use in making furniture for his house. The trees were sold to him at Ksh 1600. He used the money to buy dry maize for his family to use and the rest he was using in meeting his own basic daily needs as well as those of his family.

Since he bought his tea seedlings from Kericho in 1961, he has occasionally been running tea nurseries and selling the planting materials to people within his village. His sons assist him with required inputs and one of his sons as well as his grandson usually provide labour in preparing the seed bed. He waters the seedlings on his own using water from his well at home. After six months the seedlings are ready for planting. Patroba sells the seedlings at five shillings each but if the seedlings remain in the seed bed until ten months before he gets a market for them, the selling price rises to seven shillings each or more depending on the extra time for maturing. The bigger the seedlings the better because their survival rate in adverse conditions is higher. He currently has 2000 seedlings for sale and will put up another seedbed after he sells them.

Patroba told me that there are also other people who do the same business in the village, saying that in fact Nyasaka has more seed beds than himself. He explained that he always maintains only two beds at each time. He sells in small quantities such as 200 to 300 seedlings to people from around the village who want to add to there already existing bushes. Nyasaka on the other hand sells to people from as far as Rigoma about 15 kilometres away as he usually has more seedlings and is young enough to market his seedlings in distant areas.

He said that he had stopped nursery business for several years and only resumed seven years ago. He established a tea nursery to get seedlings to replace the old tea bushes he had uprooted. Because he ended up with extra seedlings he sold them at Ksh 500. He usually sells to neighbours who need small amounts of tea seedlings. One may buy 200 to 300 seedlings at most. Those who buy from him in bulk—over 5000 seedlings usually come from far. He said that for him the most difficult task in the business was filling small polythene bags with soil, but watering is easier as he has a well in his compound.

Patroba is a staunch Seventh Day Adventist who returns a tithe of 10% of all his income including tea earnings to the church and is a member of the local church choir. He occasionally goes to the village shopping centre to take tea and have a chat with his friends and age mates. The money he usually spends is from tea earnings. Church members usually visit his home especially to pray

with his sick wife. Friends and relatives usually assist him with finger millet for his wife's consumption as doctors have discouraged her from consuming maize meal (*ugali*) because of her diabetes. As church members they also contribute money with which they buy presents such as furniture and utensils for their members who wed in church. He told us that church members give offerings in the church regularly drawing mainly from their tea earnings. It is through such offerings that they managed to build a permanent church in the village under his leadership as head elder of the church in the 1990s.

One of his sons Ongaki is a school teacher and he stays in Sotik. He regularly visits his parents and assists them whenever there is material or financial need. In particular he assisted with paying school fees for his younger brothers and sisters. Another son Simon married through a Seventh Day Adventist Church wedding in 1991. The family assisted him to pay bride price. He had one cow which he bought from earnings as a photographer. His father gave him one cow, his brother Ongaki gave him another and his uncles gave him another. The church assisted with transport costs. Joyce and Jane were also married through church weddings. The bride price paid for Joyce was used to settle a few expenses in preparation for Jane's wedding. Two cows were paid as bride price for Jane. These and one cow contributed by her brother Ongaki were used to settle their elder brother Okioro's bride price.

Patroba has subdivided the tea farm which he bought at Eranda for his son's inheritance. Each of them has been given 700 bushes. The tea at home belongs solely to him and is part of his '*emonga*'. Earnings from the tea have enabled him to acquire one cow. He feeds it on the Napier grass on his land which he says is more than enough and also on the pasture paddocks he has established. He has also shown his married sons portions of land on which they plant maize, finger millet, sugar cane and kales. One of his sons grows Napier grass at the edges of his portion. He sells the grass to neighbours and other villagers, sometimes giving it free of charge to his father to feed his cow with when he lacks enough from his fields.

Members of his family including his wife and his sons' wives milk the cow on a rotational basis. At the end of his land towards the river he has planted trees, mostly Eucalyptus which provides him with firewood. He occasionally sells some of the trees to get money for his day-to-day needs. He said that due to sub-division of land in the village for purposes of inheritance, acreage per family is steadily declining. As a result not many people have the land to plant new tea and so many only inherit a few bushes from their parent and live on it. He told us that there are many conflicts between parents and their grown up children over tea which leads up to sub-division for inheritance, after which many parents are abandoned by their children. Patroba explained that he was lucky that most of his children have grown up in church and would not abandon him and that he had tea on land he had bought in 1969 which he sub-divided for his sons leaving the tea at home for himself and his wife.

Patroba's daughters and their husbands usually visit him and have been of much help in paying hospital bills and buying diabetes drugs for his sick wife. His daughter Lydia assists with food preparation as his wife can not manage the work. Patroba usually cuts Napier grass to feed his cow and also attends to other activities in the homestead. He also assists in paying school fees for his son Reuben's children as need arises using his tea earnings.

In 1950 Europeans introduced pyrethrum into Gusiiland. They had first planted the crop at the Sotik highlands and they taught people how to grow the crop. Patroba got his first seedlings from neighbours and some from Girango and Tombe both in Nyamira District. He planted them and they multiplied and he replanted them at a larger scale. By that time farmer cooperatives had sprung up and they used to sell the produce to Tombe Farmers' Cooperative Society and later to Miriri Cooperative Society. He told us that tea has become an important cash crop since pyrethrum collapsed when World market prices tumbled in the late 1970s and early 1980s. It was at that time that they quickly uprooted the crop and started doing other things that could give them money. He said that the government has been trying to persuade them to plant pyrethrum again by offering high prices for the crop but they have refused, because people have not forgotten the losses they made when the market disappeared. The

cooperative societies have since collapsed and only buildings like the one at Tombe and the other at Miriri are evidence that they once existed. People prefer tea to pyrethrum, because pyrethrum has a lot of work especially weeding regularly and they have no land for it, tea has taken most of the land

His son Ongaki who is a school teacher at Cheplat in Sotik has bought a piece of land in Kitale using a loan he acquired from Mwalimu Cooperative Society. He usually comes at the end of the month and assists his parents and siblings financially. He also buys such items as sugar, salt and kerosene for his parents. Okiro works as a lumber man in Sotik, Simion occasionally teaches in nursery schools while Reuben the last born usually sells black tea in the neighbouring Tombe market. On his relationship with his relatives-in-law he explained, he visits his daughter's homesteads to greet his grandchildren and whenever there is sickness or a problem. He does not visit his *korera* that is his sons' parents-in-law very often, but goes there when there is a problem like a funeral.

Patroba said that when he was growing up, diseases were not common. For example, he had stayed in Kericho for eight years without suffering from malaria. He however complains that nowadays, diseases are many and more frequent. People spend most of their resources on diseases than investing. He attributes this to the steady growth of the population. He said he had used a lot of resources to hospitalise his son who later died in 2002 and that more resources were being used on his diabetic wife's medicines and occasional hospitalisation.

Patroba has also ventured into business in the past using tea earnings. In 1970 he joined a group of six people each contributing five hundred shillings to start a business of buying timber from Molo and selling the same at Keroka. The business collapsed due to rising costs in rent and purchases. Most of their sales were on credit and the customers defaulted. They finally closed the business after it became cash strapped. They started the business on the basis of mutual trust with his friends and elected one of them as the chairman. He had to oversee the daily operations of the business at Keroka. With time, they found that the business was declining steadily. After the total collapse of the business, the

man they had selected as chairman opened a carpentry workshop at Keroka. That is when they discovered that the man probably used to direct the business resources into his own use. The chairman died around 1978–80 and so we were not able to establish the real causes of the collapse of the business.

The other partners went back to their farming activities and it is only two partners who are still alive that is Mr. Nyachwaya from Miriri and himself. Patroba has since concentrated on farming activities. He said that had tried many times like other villagers, to use his tea earnings to venture into high profit trade. He had however, not succeeded because his partners embezzle business funds to get rich quickly. Patroba used to be a member of several self help groups. In particular the Miriri Sengereri education self help group assisted him with money. They came and contributed for him to pay hospital bills. He also used to be a member of Miriri Umoja self help group although he never benefited from the group. He quit the group earlier and it is collapsing steadily. The group started in the late 1970s by pooling resources from about fifty villagers to buy *matatu* (taxi) vehicles. This was achieved without a hitch and with profits a posho mill was purchased in the early 1980s and another in the early 1990s. Recently they sold the vehicles and there were rumours in the village in 2005 that they were planning to sell the posho mills. They have two posho mills—one at Sengereri shopping centre and another one at Miriri junction. Patroba said the decline has to do with the leadership base that is poor arguing that the leaders squandered too much in disregard to the real owners' interests

Patroba told us that in the community, they have initiated several projects such as Sengereri Primary School, Miriri Dispensary and Reburari tea buying centre. Originally their children used to go to Miriri Primary about three kilometres away. Patroba further explained that they have a common spring where they draw water. He contributed a hundred shillings toward the purchase of cement and sand. The Rural Water Development (RWD) a programme of the Ministry of Water in the 1980s gave them a mason who helped in protecting the water source and putting a tap for them. Initially they were told to contribute Ksh 1000 as a community that draws water from that village spring (*ensoko*). They presented the money to the RWD organization

which brought sand and cement. He however does not remember whose idea it was, but said he and other tea farmers in the village take pride in participating in community-wide projects to improve life in the village. He said that when people come together their individual contributions are small but they make a difference in the village.

He told us that in the village they have impromptu organizations that oversee funeral arrangements. These organisations are formed when death occurs. They are not in existence all the time like in some other villages. When a death occurs, villagers usually sit down, set up an organising committee and agree on certain issues pertaining to the ensuing funeral. They then contribute depending on the intensity of the problem, for example they may agree to contribute five hundred shillings per family, if the body has to be brought in from Mombasa or Nairobi but if the body is at Kisii or Nyamira they contribute a hundred shillings per household. It also depends on the amount of money owed in hospital bills at the time of death.

The same occurs when there are weddings and parties (*ebigeni bia abana* or *ekerero*). People contribute according to their ability. No particular figure is imposed on them. There are those who do not have anything to give but are allowed to participate in the parties. Patroba observed that people who have tea offer financial support easily when there is a problem in the village requiring such support, especially if such a problem occurred around the time they are paid for tea leaf deliveries. Patroba does not sell any cow dung. It is usually used in the homestead. They mix it with clay soil to smear house floors; it is only his family members who use it. Sometimes they manure vegetable gardens (*ebiticha*) with the cow dung and he also uses it to manure the Napier grass.

In the course of interviewing the respondent one day, an elderly lady arrived. She greeted the respondent from outside. The respondent told her “*Bwammabo*, (literally meaning cousin, but could mean clan-mate as well) *come right in. I have got visitors with me here*”. She came into the house and was given a seat. She told Patroba that she knew us because we had visited her home and talked with her home severally. After exchanging pleasantries, the

lady explained that she had come to Patroba's neighbour's home to get some herbs for her teeth that were aching but the neighbour was away. So she passed by Patroba's home to find out how they were faring. Patroba told her that they were okay and that his wife had gone to the hospital for her usual checkups.

She then inquired about some noise she had heard from the neighbourhood and Patroba explained that it was one of his neighbour's sons who were fighting because one of the son's goats had strayed to the other's maize garden, hence the cause of the fighting. "Okay" replied the lady as she left. The lady was Sauri's wife from across the valley on the other side of the village. Patroba told us he had known her husband since they were young and that they had worked together at the tea plantations in Kericho in the late 1940s. Patroba was also at the party following Sauri's marriage to the lady in the 1960s as were a number of people they had worked with in Kericho such as Mzee Okonu, Nyaanga and Onduso. He said that the people who had worked in Kericho had formed an informal group and used to visit each other in the villages. He explained that the most important benefit they got from the plantations was the idea of tea growing. His contemporaries in the plantations such as Sauri, Nyakundi and Okonu were also pioneer tea growers in the village and had helped many other villagers to plant tea.

When we were almost through with the interview, Patroba's grandson came in to ask for some ten shillings to have his sandals repaired and after Patroba enquired about the boy's mother's whereabouts, he promised to give him the money. Patroba summed up his life as follows:

I have tried to have a good life and I have given education to my children. I used to get enough money to cater for daily needs easily. It is not like today. I got the employment I wanted after pursuing education. In those days, parents never bothered to take their children to school. I struggled all by myself. First I went to Kericho looking for money that assisted me through the first few years of my schooling. I bought land to expand on what I had inherited from my father. I am in good health and I can do tedious work unlike other men of my age (78) who wasted themselves drinking (beer). If you see them they look older than me. I have got grandchildren who will pass on my generation.

Patroba considers his life as successful because of achieving what he aspired for by the grace of God. He advises his sons how to save and invest for the future needs of their children. He contributes regularly in tithes and offerings to the local church. He explained that he had brought up his children as Christians and given them a formal education. The education has enabled some of them to gain formal employment and they are supportive to the family. Mzee Patroba could be one of the richest people in his village. However, because of ill health of some of his family members most of his resources have dwindled. First, one of his sons was sick for a long time and later died. Then his wife is diabetic and spends long periods of time in hospital. This has drained him financially. His last born son who is a trader in black tea usually takes his mother to hospital and buys fruits for her as recommended by doctors.

2.1. Genesis of village tea growing: the Kericho Connection

Like many young men in his village at the time Patroba commenced life by migrating to the former 'White Highlands' to work in the tea plantations around Kericho, in Rift Valley Province. Patroba's life history indicates a strong link between employment, experience and interest in large scale tea plantations in Kericho and actual establishment of tea by the labour migrants on their farms in the study village.

Patroba started farming after he had worked in Kericho for several years. He went back to school after working in Kericho for about eight years. After school he was employed, but his Kericho connection lured him to planting tea on his father's land in 1961 even as he continued to work with a cooperative society where he was employed in 1960. Patroba planted tea before sharing their parents' land with his brothers and ended up giving some of his tea bushes to his father and other bushes going to his younger brother when they eventually shared up the land for inheritance. He thus started by planting tea on his ancestral rather than on purchased land. However, he eventually inherited about five acres of land from his father. The tea bushes that Patroba gave to his father finally ended up with his last born brother when his father passed on. The tea that Patroba had planted in 1961 therefore, ended up

with two of his brothers. Although his brothers may not have worked in Kericho during the colonial period Patroba's work and experience there had provided them with tea.

It was common in the village for an elder brother to plant tea across their parents' land and for it to end up with their younger brothers when land was eventually shared up for them to inherit. Benefits from the 'big brother' essentially originated in their migration to work in the Kericho tea plantations and the experience and skills that they gained there. The spread of this experience and skills in tea production was supported by the strong extended family networks common with the Abagusii people together with the workgroups that the former migrants summoned in which people learned about tea by doing. In this kinship arrangement an elder brother carries himself as an elder in his father's company or in his place if he died early and in the process seeks to acquire development on their land which is eventually shared with younger brothers.

Patroba and his contemporaries at work in the tea plantations were some of the earliest people to plant tea in their village. Part of the reason for being first is that they had some gainful employment which provided the requisite capital for the tea venture. Besides, their Kericho connection had demystified tea growing and sharpened their appetite for income. Unlike other villagers, migrant labour had, owing to their experience long appreciated that Africans could successfully grow tea. When other villagers may have been worried about the procurement of seedlings and the possibilities of learning to pluck tea, they "*had seen it all at Kericho*".

Migrant labour to the Kericho tea plantations appear to have provided a critical mass of knowledge of and positive aptitude to tea growing long before the tea extension service arrived in the village. At another level it is plausible to argue that tea extension work when it eventually arrived in the village was easier because of the skills and experience accumulated by the migrant labour and their families. While the two domains, migrant labour skills and extension service may have complemented and reinforced each other in spreading tea growing in the village, migrant labour clearly originated the idea and practice in the

village. It was apparent from local discussions that the earliest people to plant tea were those who worked in the tea plantations.

Irianyi Tea Buying Centre registered with KTDA as Tea Buying Centre Number Three (TEO3) served the villagers in the 1960s and 1970s. In this tea buying centre seven out of the earliest ten registered tea growers had worked in the Kericho tea plantations in the 1950s and 1960s¹. Migrant labour thus provided focal points in tea growing in the early years of crop acceptance i.e. in the 1960s and early 1970s. Besides, the former plantation workers sharing out some of their tea bushes with their younger brothers, they also shared knowledge on tea growing with their relatives in their villages and beyond. In a kinship based society such as the Abagusii this constituted a powerful tool supplementing the KTDA efforts at spreading the crop in the villages. The striking thing about the role of migrant labour in the spread of tea growing on the Gusii areas including Sengereri is that it was voluntary and informal to the extent that it is so far hardly documented and debated. This reality challenges the common view that tea growing was a result of external interventions by the KTDA (Nyangito, 2000: 14) and interrogates the non-physical conditions that may have contributed to the relative smoothness of this external intervention. The existing physical factors that supported KTDA extension include ample climate, topography and soil types. Beyond these physical factors were a positively predisposed population that had some of the required knowledge, capital and confidence in tea, all a result of the work and presence of migrant labour. This evidence challenges views that privilege planned interventions in processes of smallholder tea development such as Talbott (2002: 152) who attributes the rise of African tea growing in Kenya after the Second World War to government efforts.

Migrant labour to the Kericho tea plantations has continued unabated since it began in earnest in the 1920s. The people currently working there constitute a third or fourth generation of

¹ Personal discussions (February 2004 and November 2005) with the founder chairman of the tea buying centre Mzee Nelson Ontita who served from 1964–1984 as well as with the current chairman Mr. Francis Mauncho and committee member Mr. Onyango.

migrant labourers from Sengereri Village. Although tea growing is widespread and the numbers of tea bushes per family are steadily declining due to land sub-division for inheritance, the nature of tea husbandry in migrants' farms is traceable to their migration to the tea plantations. Current migrants' tea farms stand out in the village for being plucked more neatly, weeded in time and the tea bushes generally levelled out on the top much better than in the rest of the village where the bushes are largely rugged. In some non-migrant farms tea is also inter-cropped with passion fruit trees or with maize unlike migrants who keep it in pure stand. Migrant labour thus continues to influence tea management in the village to date.

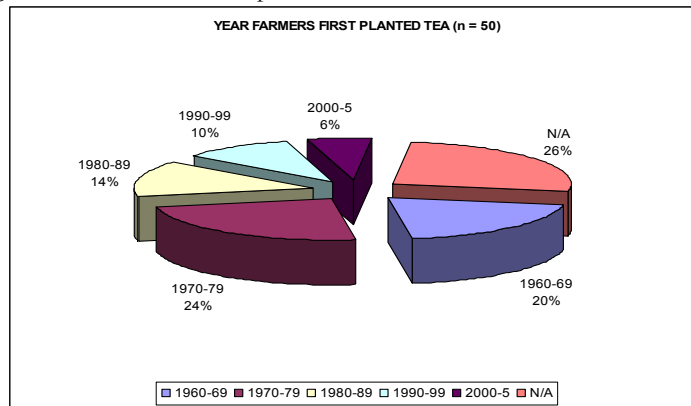
Patroba's story on when he and other villagers first planted tea is confirmed by survey data (Figure 1). Tea growing in Sengereri village appears to have commenced in the 1960s when 25% of the respondents first planted tea on their farms. In the 1970s a further 29% of the farmers interviewed planted their tea. In the 1980s and 1990s, 14% and 10% of the farmers respectively planted their tea, while only 8% of the respondents planted their tea between 2000 and 2005. Only 32% of the respondents planted their tea in the twenty five years between 1980 and 2005 compared to 54% during the twenty years from 1960–1979.

Part of the explanation for that scenario is that land acreage per family has been declining steadily over the years. Most of the tea was planted in the 1960s and 1970s when land was first consolidated and registered. The first tea growing therefore coincided with the commencement of land titling in Gusiland, so that as people became land owners they also planted tea. Thereafter, whenever land is subdivided for inheritance tea is equally inherited and mostly those who fail to inherit, plant new tea. Thus new tea planting has been declining since the end of the 1970s. This scenario further confirms that the Kericho tea plantations connection and influence has been an important factor in smallholder tea development in Nyamira District in the last forty five years. This is because the local economy was largely controlled by migrant labour to the Kericho plantations in the 1960s and 1970s as demonstrated in village discourse as well as in the life histories. They formed a majority in the villages of people with a regular income and who had also travelled outside Gusiland. That Kericho connection was not only important for

tea establishment in the villages but also for securing resources for commencing life in marriage, which in turn entrenched local hunger for income to maintain families and invariably the need both to plant tea and to migrate in larger numbers to the tea plantations.

The years 1960–1979 may be described as having been for tea establishment and expansion. For instance this is the period within which Patroba first planted tea on his farm and went on to purchase additional land for tea expansion. From 1980 onwards establishment of new tea farms declined significantly. Although records in tea buying centres indicate that the number of growers was growing much faster after 1980 than before, majority of those newly registered growers inherited rather than newly establish tea farms. Real innovative work in establishing tea in Gusiiland appears to have been carried out by the first generation of growers anchored in their indirect or direct Kericho tea plantations connection.

Figure 1: Year farmers first planted tea on their farms



Source: Field Survey, 2005

2.2. Labour process in tea production: the rise of moral communities

Tea growing is a labour intensive enterprise. After the tea crop is established, labour is required regularly for plucking and weeding. While weeding may be fairly irregular especially for a mature crop, plucking is done repeatedly every eleven to twelve days and can be demanding on labour. Tea plucking is also a significantly skilled activity because of the high quality tea leaves demanded by tea factories that purchase from small holders. For this reason labour for tea production must be carefully organised with a view to obtaining the best possible quality and quantity of tea leaves for the highest returns. Small holder producers largely rely on family labour to the extent possible to carry out all related tasks.

Patroba was aged, and looked strong but said his health did not allow him to pluck tea although he could weed for it in the mornings. His wife was however bed ridden with diabetes. Age and ailment compelled Patroba to style of labour organisation from other farmers who were younger and stronger relying on family labour to run the tea enterprise. On the contrary Patroba's style centred on hired labour to pluck the tea and deliver to the tea buying centre.

The idea and practice of employing external labour to pluck one's tea is internally considered a contribution to the wellbeing of the worker. This is part of the reason for retaining trusted relatives, neighbours or friends in the work so that they could draw other benefits from the work relationship. It was observed that covertly the farmers attempted to influence those who worked for them to follow certain practices such as Christianity or certain forms of farming back home. One elderly farmer told me, "*Matara was my worker for about 15 years and I helped him plant tea on his farm because he was a loyal worker, now he's a prominent tea farmer in the village.*"

Patroba had specific people he hired regularly to pluck his tea. The people he hired were largely part of his extended family. He hired them regularly in order to hold them responsible for the quality and quantity of tea plucked. Because they plucked the tea regularly, if they did it badly crop deterioration would easily be discussed with them. Equally the quality delivered to the buying

centre could be guaranteed to avoid complaints by the buying centre clerk over varying quality if workers are hired randomly and varied from time to time. Patroba had also developed trust in his workers and could let them deliver the tea leaves to the buying centre in his absence expecting them not to cheat on weight.

Labour is not just acquired in the market on the basis of first come first served. Trust is crucial in labour management for tea production because the bushes are fragile and if plucked roughly, carelessly and maliciously, yields will drop. Supervision is not sufficient to ensure careful plucking, trust on the part of the employer and truthfulness on the part of employees does the trick. Trusted workers consider the tea their life line and pluck carefully to ensure their work is continuous and their employer is happy with their work in order to rely on them all the time.

In general, villagers relied on family labour especially women and children to tend the tea and pluck it. Family labour appeared to become less important as parents grew old or sick and as children went to work or commenced their lives on the farm. However, where this was not possible due to age or ill-health, hired labour was crucial. This labour was carefully selected with the aim of assuring not just quality of work and output but also to ensure the employers' security, privacy and interests. It is for this reason that farmers ended up recruiting trusted close relatives or neighbours whom they regularly called upon to work for them. Many of the villagers interviewed said they had specific people who worked for them in the tea farms regularly. It was also observed that not all relatives who sought work were recruited, only trusted ones were. Fears of witchcraft constituted other criteria for the selection of workers.

Trusted workers were treated well by their employers. Besides paying them most employers provided them with breakfast and to a lesser extent lunch for free. The employees largely commuted from their nearby homes to work and returned home at the end of each working day. It was observed that after work employees could often get vegetables or firewood from the employers' homes for their own use. Some of those workers who had worked for many years in one farm often enjoyed intermittent

financial support from employers' children who worked away in towns like Nairobi.

In particular, it was observable in the village that tea farmers and their workers (those who plucked their tea regularly and were more often than not trusted members of the farmers' extended family, lineage or neighbourhood) had formed recognisable moral communities; based on trust loyalty and solidarity (cf. Sztompka, 1999: 4–5). The farmers trusted the workers and left them to work without supervision and to deliver and weigh tea leaf at the buying centres on their own. This trust was not based entirely on the money paid to the workers but also on the fact that they had accepted the employer's trust and could not break it. The workers' loyalty and solidarity apart from being based on their pay and continued retention at work also more importantly stemmed from their sense of belonging to a moral community with the farmer as exemplified in their communion over meals and other gifts including milk and vegetables, as well as other social security relations, in the extended family and lineage. Beyond the moral communities in the labour process were incidences of distrust where workers siphoned tea from employers and weighed or recorded it in their own names.

2.3. Earning a living through tea: resource moulding in different ways

Patroba has relied largely on tea earnings to organise his life. He has attempted to educate his children mainly using tea earnings. In this front he appears to have succeeded in translating his children's education in to gainful employment in that a daughter and a son are school teachers. These two have been helpful in supporting Patroba and his ailing wife whenever they are in need. In one direction, therefore, Patroba has moulded his tea and tea earnings into employed children and their spouses who provide sustainable streams of remittances in his old age. Besides, his son who is a teacher has purchased land in Trans-Nzoia District and thus eased pressure on Patroba's land.

Earlier in the 1970s, Patroba had in the company of business partners ventured in to a timber dealership at Keroka town. His capital contribution to the business was from tea and

other agricultural as well as employment earnings. Although the business did not survive for long and was eventually closed down, Patroba demonstrated a common trend in the village where tea or other agricultural earnings are increasingly used as an escape route from direct farming into town based business and brief case tea farming. It is the desire of most villagers especially men to evolve from tea farmers to business people in the market or town centres and leave farming with spouses assisted by hired labour. It is partly for this reason that shops were emerging along the roads and foot paths in the village.

The meaning of tea as a resource is therefore contested at village level. Some actors define and treat tea as a final and permanent resource upon which they draw in its form on the farm, both in the short and long term. Such actors are content with the tea farm. Other actors however, define and treat tea as a source of income and prestige that constitutes a springboard to other resources such educated and employed children, or business opportunities. Patroba's story represents the latter and captures a restless and go-getter life style. Such actors bordered on speculation, seeking more tenable ways of raising more income and reaching higher levels of actualisation.

Using tea and other income, Patroba purchased land in the neighbourhood of his village. In order to increase his tea earnings he planted more tea on the purchased land. This way he had used his tea earnings to extend his tea farming and to raise more income. This land has turned out handy in old age when he divided it up for his sons, leaving the tea on his original farm for his own use. Unlike other people of his age in the village, he is not disempowered through surrender of most tea to sons as many have. The land he purchased earlier has cushioned him sufficiently. For that reason among others intergenerational conflicts over resources are not pronounced in his household.

Patroba's life history demonstrates that owing to his understanding of the tea enterprise while working in the Kericho plantations, he started a tea nursery business. This business has provided an extra income stream intermittently since the 1970s. He stops the business for a year or two when he runs out of money to buy inputs to set tea nurseries and develop seedlings for

sale locally. Some of the people who had worked in the Kericho plantations during the colonial period had picked one tea skill or other which they moulded in to a saleable service in the villages. While there were other villagers who like Patroba run tea nurseries, others provided tea pruning services to other tea farmers at a fee per bush pruned. In this way agile farmers went beyond tea leaves to create and recreate further resources from the skills they acquired as they interacted with the tea plant on their farms and elsewhere.

The tea nursery business is a further indication of Patroba's go-getter life style. He further contested and extended the meaning of tea as a resource by locating in it an opportunity to create a tea nursery business. At the time he commenced tea nurseries in the 1970s, farmers used to purchase tea seedlings directly from KTDA nurseries or from Kericho tea plantations which were run by White Settler farmers. His experience in the Kericho tea plantations is arguably part of the reason for customers' confidence in his tea seedlings, as he had worked at the known credible source of knowledge in tea husbandry.

Patroba like most other villagers turns his tea earnings into entertainment and leisure. He occasionally uses his money to drink tea in local kiosks. He spends time in the church and believes in returning tithes and offerings to his local church regularly. Patroba also appears to be comfortable with his God's blessings for being a stout Christian. He sees the blessings in terms of his children's unity and assistance to each other, his relatively good health and attributes his wife's ill health to Satan's tribulations of God's elect. In taking such a stance, Patroba draws energy for his life from the realms of the supernatural and thus potentially carries the power of his tea earnings via church to the mystic. In a sense he moulds his tea earnings into mystic resources that add value to his life and in his own mind ultimately explains his success in life.

2.4. From tea farming to business ventures: a failed transition?

Patroba attempted severally to transition from tea farming to other businesses including a timber dealership, *posho* mills and *matatu* (taxi) business—all of them in league with other villagers

with a similar aspirations. This was in line with the desire of most villagers to use their tea earnings to transition from farming to town based businesses. The key motivation for seeking the transition is the general view in the villages that businesses constitute faster avenues to wealth accumulation and comfort. For such reasons people form partnerships or go into businesses as individuals as soon as they have some tea or other farm income to spare.

Like many people in his village Patroba has tried his hand in many business ventures on his own or in partnership with others. A key non-core farm business venture that he has undertaken successfully is tea seedlings production for sale. He started the business in the 1960s and has been in it off and on ever since. The tea nursery business has provided an alternative though intermittent income stream for Patroba since the 1960s. With the income he was able to supplement conventional tea earnings to pay school fees for his children as well as buy food for his family as need arose.

This business run on a sole proprietorship basis has been successful compared to other businesses run by groups of which Patroba was a member. This finding appears to point to an increasingly individualistic life style in the village where in the business arena the 'mine' concept overrides the 'ours' concept and undermines partnerships and group businesses even in the middle of strong extended family and lineage systems. The extended family and lineage systems come across as more of consumptive than productive systems especially beyond the farm into the business arena where the owner is 'invisible' and the returns largely 'anonymous'.

The distrust in the business arena among villagers is best captured when Patroba teamed up with other people to use his tea and other income to start a timber dealership in Keroka town. This did not last long due to the untrustworthiness of the chairman of the business who was in charge of its day to day running. He embezzled business resources and brought the business to its knees. Although the partnership had commenced on the basis of mutual trust, soon distrust set in and it collapsed.

The same distrust is reflected in several self-help groups that Patroba has joined over his life course. In particular, Miriri Sengereri Education Self Help Group benefited him once when they contributed money for him to pay hospital bills, but soon after, it collapsed due to mistrust. Miriri Umoja Group rose to success by managing to own two posho mills and two public transport vehicles. Although Patroba quit the group earlier on, during the time of field work in 2004–5, there were allegations all over the village that the committee had not paid dividends for long and that they were planning to sell posho mills in addition to losing the vehicles through mismanagement.

In general, a culture of distrust appears to exist in the village when it comes to business groups or partnerships. Individually people believe nuclear family businesses are most suitable, but due to lack of start up capital, partnerships emerge. Distrust then set in as many people are impatient and averse to developing each other progressively. This kind of distrust is widespread in the villages due to undisciplined avarice that was observed. This cupidity is reflected by the relative high rates of theft in the village as well as petty fights over resources such as land boundary disputes and straying livestock in the village.

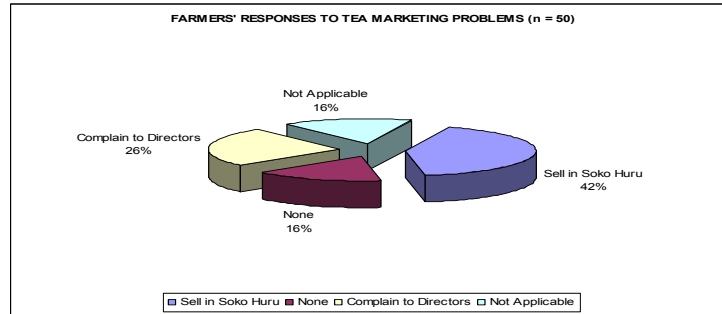
2.4.1. Tea farmers and KTDA agents: a fluid intersection of lifeworlds

The failed transition from tea growing to business may also be explained by the many problems that tea farmers face in marketing their tea leaf. These problems limit their agricultural income and hinder their capacities for transition. As shown in Figure 2, the tea marketing problems that affected most farmers interviewed include poor prices, being cheated on green leaf weight at the buying centres and rejection of tea leaf by KTDA agents at the buying centres allegedly on account of poor quality.

The issue of the quality of tea leaf delivered to the buying centres by farmers is always a contested one. Farmers insist their tea is of high quality while the KTDA clerks often question the quality and at times reject the tea. The survey results indicate that at least 76% of farmers interviewed suffered at least one of those three tea marketing problems as follows; tea rejection by KTDA clerks (12%), poor prices (40%) and cheating on weight by KTDA

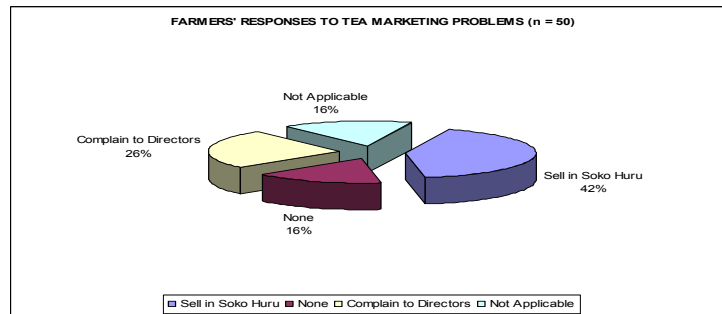
clerks (24%). In identifying those tea marketing problems the actors were contesting their relationship with KTDA the main tea buyer and processor. The perception that tea farmers receive payments monthly and are happy and contented unlike others such as coffee farmers who go for years without pay is therefore flawed.

Figure 2: Main tea marketing problems that farmers faced in 2005



Source: Field Survey, 2005

Figure 3: Farmers' responses to tea marketing problems in 2005



Source: Field Survey, 2005

Figure 3 indicates that actors responded in some way to the identified tea marketing problems. Apparently in response to the main problems mentioned above, majority of the farmers

interviewed (42%) sell their tea leaf in *soko buru* (middlemen's markets) who in turn sell it to the private tea factories in the neighbouring Bomet and Kericho districts. Selling in the *soko buru* market is both a considered act of protest to the KTDA and a painful step toward freeing themselves from a single marketing channel. It is a painful step because the *soko buru* middlemen pay ten shillings per kilogram of green leaf on a one off basis on delivery compared to KTDA which pays nine shillings per kilogram of green leaf at the end of the month of delivery and an additional bonus payment every June for the green tea delivered over the previous six months and a further bonus every December for the green tea delivered during the year. Payments from KTDA for green tea leaf surpass the ten shillings per kilogram paid by the *soko buru* dealers by a wide gulf. Therefore, actors contest their skewed relationship with KTDA by taking a more painful road to make a point about their relative suffering. Other actors respond to their marketing problems by complaining to the tea factory directors that represent them. This also indicates a higher level of awareness of their problems and a form of resistance to KTDA hegemony in tea processing and marketing.

Farmers' delivery of tea leaf and its acceptance by the KTDA clerk at the buying centre is a negotiated process. The clerk is charged with the responsibility of ensuring that the tea leaf purchased on KTDA's behalf is of the required quality. Whenever the clerk orders a farmer to sort their tea and set aside good quality tea for weighing, the affected farmers literally persuade the clerk to accept their tea as is. The clerk may or may not agree with them. The clerk may agree instantly or after the affected farmers have removed some of the poor quality leaf. A farmer who is good at negotiating with the clerk may deliver poor quality tea consistently and it be accepted so long as the farmer remains behind at the buying centre to mix the poor quality tea with good quality tea delivered by other farmers. This way the poor quality tea is disguised as good and the clerk escapes the wrath of the senior clerk who receives the tea at the factory. Besides, farmers who negotiate to deliver poor quality tea also remain behind in the tea buying centre to help the clerk load the tea on to a lorry for transportation to the factory. This way their negotiation with the

clerk is smoother and the clerk overlooks the poor quality tea they deliver.

The clerk also negotiates his way in cheating farmers on the weights of their tea. He first locates some 'ghost farmers' i.e. those farmers mischievously registered with KTDA but have little or no tea bushes on their land. The ghost farmers pay the clerk to record in their accounts an agreed number of kilograms which the clerk acquires by cheating other farmers on the weight of their tea leaf. So the 'ghosts' and other corrupt farmers who agree to the clerk's tricks pay cash money for the 'stolen tea' to be recorded on their respective registered accounts at the end of each day. In order to succeed in cheating farmers on the weight of their tea, the clerk tampers with the weighing machine so that it under weighs to certain predetermined extents. The clerk may also deduct more than the one kilogram allowed on account of the bag in which tea is weighed. Clerks also work slowly to create artificial congestion in the buying centres so that when farmers are tired and eager to leave, the clerk's *mashabiki* (his hangers-on and handlers) offer to assist farmers to weigh in their tea. In the process the *mashabiki* lift the bags of tea on the weighing machine thus under weighing it.

It is for the foregoing reasons that farmers resist and routinely complain to factory directors. When action is not taken on the clerks, some farmers resort to selling their tea leaf cheaply to *soko huru* dealers hence distancing themselves from KTDA. This is however usually temporary and when circumstances change as clerks reassess their strategies for self preservation on job and in life the farmers link up again with KTDA. Clerks always assess their situations and do damage control by getting lenient on quality enforcement to win back disgruntled farmers rest they be seen as undermining KTDA by pushing away farmers to the *soko huru* dealers to the disadvantage of their employer.

In the course of such turns and twists, younger and more militant farmers resort to violence against tea buying clerks who are considered notorious in cheating on weight or ambitiously enforcing quality requirements. If the clerk in question is widely disapproved by farmers, this violence may be during the day otherwise most assaults on clerks occur at night when they are late in the buying centre. In anticipation of such violence, clerks often

surround themselves with *mashabiki*, many of whom are 'ghost farmers' to provide security at buying centres especially at night. Farmers also target and ostracise 'ghost farmers' and others known to benefit from corruption at tea buying centres.

Overall, tea farming is an enterprise marked with a whole gamut of contests. Some contests are amongst farmers over who is to be elected to the tea buying committee and subsequently to the factory board of directors. Other contests are between farmers and tea buying centre committee members over tea leaf weight cheating and quality enforcement. There are also contests between farmers and tea buying centre clerks over weight cheating, quality enforcement and perceived low prices on tea delivered. Being at the frontline the clerk is often questioned by farmers over delayed payments, despite the fact that such is beyond his control. Further contests and struggles revolve around 'ghost farmers' who are hated and ridiculed by other farmers, but who keep a low profile and feign landlessness, poverty and ignorance or even foolishness to appear harmless even as they reap benefits from corruption at the lowest rung of society.

Even amidst such contests to survive in tea farming, actors have to retain good relationships with KTDA buying centre clerks at least overtly. For tea leaf to be transformed into readily useable resources in terms of income, it must be weighed and recorded by the clerk at the buying centre. For this reason the clerk is usually treated with awe by farmers. Even if they do not like his services, they have to persevere at least in the short run as they push for a transfer. But transfers do not come easy as the under weighing network allegedly include factory authorities. In the event of such entrenched networks of deception, corruption fights back hurting farmers even more. That perhaps explains farmers' covert resistance to tea buying centre clerks on a continuous basis.

The corruption and theft at tea buying centre level is socio-historically constructed and largely resulting from the nature of the smallholder tea industry and its historical development in the area. As indicated earlier smallholder tea establishment coincided with land adjudication and registration mainly from the mid 1960s into the early 1970s. This gave first time land owners the opportunity to plan their farms and plant as much tea as possible. With the population in the larger Gusii areas growing at about 4% per

annum throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, land scarcity soon set in. Essentially even the first generation of tea planters were already constrained with land scarcity in these densely populated highlands.

The tea established by the first generation of planters has been shared out for inheritance over time, to the extent that the competition between food and cash crops for land has denied some actors a chance to own tea at all or to own as much as they would prefer. Under the circumstances, corruption and theft at tea buying centre level appears to be a creative response by under-resourced actors to mobilise resources within the dominant tea sub-sector for survival. Besides being dominant the tea sub-sector is about the only source of income on the highlands. Coffee is fast following on the tracks of pyrethrum in collapsing leaving in its wake serious destruction of livelihoods. As well the response in terms of theft and corruption coincides with tea buying centre clerks fairly underpaid and operating within the Kenyan national culture that tolerates corrupt tendencies in most spheres of life.

The complex nature of corruption and theft at tea buying centre level is such that 'theft of tea' occurs within and between households and families. A son 'buys tea' stolen from their mother. Some 'buy tea' stolen from their own wives. This is because most theft and corruption is organised around under weighing tea leaf in order to cheat farmers off their tea and selling the 'stolen kilograms' to the ghost farmers and others who play along. Under weighing tea for purposes of stealing from farmers is universal in the study area, so that those who 'buy stolen tea' actually end up buying what was stolen from them as they weighed in their tea during the material day.

Although skewed in favour of tea buying centre clerks who reap huge benefits from it, theft and corruption appears strategic in the livelihoods of the ghost farmers and tea buying centre *mashabiki*. This is because these 'pest farmers' own few tea bushes or none but are able to earn and function just like average tea farmers in the village. They have managed to share in the proceeds of the dominant economic activity in the village by strategically anchoring on frustrated tea buying centre clerks and intimidated farmers, whose resistance is too subtle yet. In a sense this theft and

corruption has led to painful redistribution of a kind within and between households in the village.

At another level the corruption and theft comes across as a smallholder tea sub-sector derived livelihood style that is locally embedded and socially constructed in response to shrinking physical resources, characteristic local cupidity and institutional weaknesses in the sub-sector. The KTDA and tea buying centre management committees are too deeply sucked into the corruption and theft to combat it. Committee members and KTDA officials are often beneficiaries of theft and corruption in the sub-sector. A style of livelihood based on theft and corruption around tea is significant in the villages of Nyamira District. Actors who follow this livelihood style are intrinsically tied up to the tea buying centres. They wake up early and go to the tea buying centre to start laying strategies for the day and to check out any rumours or plans of others that may affect their undertakings. Their minds are so permanently fixed on the tea buying centre that they report there even on Saturdays and Sundays when tea is not plucked and the centres are un-operational. Actors such as those literary hover around tea buying centres like scavengers around carcasses.

2.5. Tea farming and community life: 'feeling alive'

Village life is organised around tea. It is therefore expected that tea earnings would be handy in mobilising villagers around village wide activities. Although community life is itself a resource in the sense of providing networks for accessing tangible resources, to latch on such networks one needs basic tangible resources to enrol in them. The notion of community life is deeply entrenched in the study area and encompasses people's participation in social life beyond the household or family largely but not exclusively for the benefit of others. The arenas for participation include taking tea in the village kiosk in the company of others, taking *busaa* with other people in the village drinking houses, linking up with other villagers to negotiate the bride price for a neighbour's daughter, getting involved in the construction of a church, a school, a tea buying centre or even protecting a village water point. In explaining the importance of doing things in communion with others one villager told me, "*in working with other*

for the benefit of all of us, I feel alive?. In a sense villagers appeared to evaluate the success or otherwise of their lives partly on the bases of their abilities to participate in community life including in greeting the newborn and bidding bye to the dead.

Patroba has been widely involved in community life including the establishment of a primary school, a church, a dispensary, a water project and a tea buying centre. In a way Patroba comes across as a formidable community leader who has used his wealth created through tea growing as well as his church network to rise to a leadership position although at an informal level. Overall, it appears that villagers ventured into community activities in proportion to their personal wealth or success in their lives. The propensity to provide leadership at community level and to offer resources for the establishment or improvement of community facilities such as schools or dispensaries was dictated by the level of success of one's life. It was observed that less successful or relatively poorer villagers were shy in taking part in community life including even facilitating funeral ceremony meetings at village levels and were less likely to attend other meetings to discuss community wide problems (cf. Omoka, 1991).

Everyday life in Sengereri and in other neighbouring villages is organised around tea. Inter-household assistance in monetary terms or in kind is derived directly or indirectly from tea. Inputs for food production were acquired through tea income or tea related sources such as remittances from children outside the village but who were educated using incomes from tea. Church offerings and gifts for parties to welcome the newborn or to send away the dead had a direct or indirect link to tea. In a sense most village life was tightly bound up with tea and participation in community life was a function of involvement in the tea enterprise. If one was at the periphery of the tea enterprise they were equally peripheral actors in community life.

Although tea remained the most important activity around which everyday village life was organised, there was evidence of resistance to that dominance. Tobacco, kales and passion fruit growing were emerging avenues out of the tea culture. *Busaa* business, livestock trade and roadside grocery shops had also emerged as alternative loci of village life and economy. However,

all these activities continue to be relatively peripheral due to their irregular income. The future of these and other peripheral activities is bright because as land holdings per household decline over time tea growing will become increasingly unviable and more innovative and circumstantially relevant activities will take the centre stage of village life. Many of these activities are founded using tea earnings and are relevant because they service the tea economy in the village.

2.5. Looking back at life: 'I have tried...'

In looking back at their own lives villagers evaluated their performance in life in a variety of ways, in effect showing whether or not they thought they had been successful. Some had pursued their childhood ambitions to fruition while others had faltered along the way and ended up leading directionless lives. The key factor in the evaluation of their lives appears to centre on children's ability to support parents and the parents' room for manoeuvre at the point of intergenerational transfer of resources to their children. Owing mainly to his relative comfort and that of his children, Patroba evaluated his life as having been successful arguing that he had tried to live a good life and give his children an education. He attributes his success in life to the grace of God. At this point in time his life has no intergenerational conflicts over resources especially given that he had earlier bought land, planted tea on it and passed it on to his sons when the time came. This gave him a lot of room for manoeuvre at a time when others are largely dispossessed and left powerless and impoverished.

However, tea growing does not lead up to successful livelihoods such as Patroba's in what may appear like a linear fashion. Other villagers who started with similar exposure in the former 'White Highlands', inherited roughly the same acreage of land from their parents and planted approximately the same number of tea bushes as his and around the time that he did have ended up not so successful in their lives.

3. Limited Livelihoods Success: Sauri's story

An example of such a villager is Sauri in his late 70s like Patroba and whose life history is reproduced below. Unlike Patroba, Sauri's life has not been so successful. The indications of limited success in his life from his own evaluation focuses on his dispossession by his children in terms of resources in land and tea as well as his children's low education, unemployment and poverty.

Success seems to have eluded Sauri at the point that he married a second wife and followed the path of consumption rather than accumulation. His consumptive life style was evidenced by his love for beer since he was young. With two wives, a fixed acreage of land and tea bushes he appears to have spread his resources too thinly to be effective and successful. His children did not succeed in school in spite of his investing resources in their education. He appears to have lost resources in that avenue and in their failure in education; they looked inwards to his tea farm for a living.

Sauri's sub-division of his farm for his two wives and their sons for inheritance was a church-negotiated settlement to ascertain peace in his household before his baptism into the church. However, it ended up as a turning pointing his life. After receiving their part of the inheritance his second wife and her sons ignored and abandoned him in want to rely for a living on his aging first wife. His indulgence in the local brew, *busaa* and *chang'aa* constitute the hallmark of his livelihood style. He seems to have spent most of his resources out there with his friends on the brew while doing little to replenish them or accumulate. As he perfected his livelihood style around the local brew most of his sons followed suit and in order to service that style, some of them turned to theft with the result that he had to draw out even more resources to bail them out and compensate aggrieved parties whenever they were taken in.

As his sons entrenched themselves in his own livelihood style, they rebelled against his hold on the household and demanded their share of the property for inheritance. Their demands were loud and violent enough to draw the attention of the local Adventist Church which brokered peace with the result that Sauri shared out his land and tea for inheritance by his wives

and sons leaving him in want. Sauri's long involvement in thatching houses and making baskets has not helped matters. These are low paying and time consuming ventures that are locally associated with consumption because the owner of the houses thatched or baskets made (if made at owner's home) provide beer and food to the thatcher or maker throughout the period of work. This career thus appears to fit in well with Sauri's main livelihood style of organised around local brew and consumption.

Sauri is representative of villagers like Patroba who had commenced their lives through employment in the 'White Highlands' tea plantations during the colonial period. He returned home to plant tea and coffee, uprooting the latter in the 1980s when prices fell. His life is dominated by the use of his tea, house thatching and basket making earnings for local brew consumption in the company of other villagers who pursue livelihoods in similar ways and value local brew drinking groups. His life has not been so successful and his household presents a variety of fissures and conflicts especially over resources in tea.

Sauri was born in 1928 at Karantini about ten kilometres away to the East. He attended school up to standard one. He quit schooling because his mother feared that he could be taken away by the white people (Europeans) like many had been taken away for wars when her mother was young and they never returned (apparently referring to participation in World War I). So he stayed at home to look after their cattle. The cattle were his elder sister Kemuma's bride price. Sauri's brothers are Samuel Mamboleo and Sauri Nyariki.

Sauri's father had one wife and he died when they were very young. Sauri is the second born. Mamboleo is his elder brother. Mamboleo used to work in tea plantations in Kericho and being away from home made Sauri take charge of the negotiations of their sisters' bride price. His sisters include Kemuma, Bwari, Nyanchera and Agnes. All of his sisters are married and bride price paid. The bride price paid was as follows: for Kemuma, 13 cows and 12 goats; for Bwari, 15 cows and 12 goats; for Nyanchera 13 cows and 12 goats and for Agnes, 13 cows and 12 goats.

The Sauri family originally lived at a place known as Karantini (named after quarantine and indicating the point beyond

which Africans were not allowed to take their cattle during the colonial period, lest they infect European Settler farmers' cattle with disease). They moved to their present settlement in 1929 or 1930 when their father had died. After their father's burial at Karantini, their mother felt that the place was not good anymore, she moved with a group of other people from their clan, to join others who had moved to Miriri-Sengereri earlier. This place is also known as Bogisero because most of the people who live here are from the Abagisero Clan. Among the people who migrated this way with the Sauri family are Nyabicha, Kobeba and Nyamboga. On arrival they found some unoccupied land which they started working. By the time of land registration and titling in the late 1960s, more people had moved into the area and land was already scarce.

Sauri was circumcised in 1945, and went to Keriguti to pick pyrethrum the same year. Later, his maternal uncle took him together with his brother Samuel Mamboleo to Bwana Dobi at Matutu Settlement Scheme to work there. Their work was to pick pyrethrum. Sauri's salary was one shilling and fifty cents per month while at Keriguti. Bwana Dobi paid three shillings and thirty cents per month. After some time with Bwana Dobi, Sauri moved to Nyaronde where he earned six shillings per month, still doing pyrethrum work.

From Nyaronde, Sauri went to Kimari where he was employed as a turn boy on trucks that carried green tea leaves to Shauji factory. As a turn boy he was taught how to drive by Mr. Bisieri, a friendly man from the Kuria tribe. While he worked as turn boy he earned Ksh 12 per month. He was employed as a driver in the same company in 1951 and worked there up to 1958. While working with Shauji Tea Factory he developed interest in tea growing. In 1952 he carried tea seedlings from Shauji and planted them on his farm. He showed his wife how to weed and to harvest when the crop was ready.

By 1955 when his tea crop was mature he harvested tea leaf and produced home made tea for domestic use. In making the tea he used wooden pestles and mortars to pound it after fermenting it for a day or two. After crushing and sun drying it was ready for use and for sale around the village. In 1959, he returned home, planted

coffee and pyrethrum. Due to declining coffee prices, he uprooted the coffee in the 1980s. In order to be recognised as a tea farmer with KTDA in 1963 he only added more bushes and was registered as a tea grower. Sauri showed us the tea he planted without KTDA instruction and authority in the 1950s. The bushes he planted in 1963 under KTDA guidance were planted to match the ground gradient ending up in curved rows while those he planted in the 1950s, right next to the newer ones, were in straight rows.

Savings acquired from his work across the country enabled him establish his cash cropping ventures in 1959 to 1963. By 1963 he had already inherited land from his mother who held what had now become their ancestral land. Inheritance essentially meant sharing their mother's land with his brothers, while leaving some land cutting across their holdings for their mother to work for as long as she lived as per custom. Upon her demise each claimed what was theirs.

Sauri married his first wife Lucia Bitutu from Bosiango in 1963. He paid 13 cows and one goat as bride price for her. He raised the bride price from his sister Nyanchera's bride price of thirteen cows and five goats he bought using his tea earnings. The intermediary in the marriage was Mr. Nyaanga whom he had worked with in the Kericho tea plantations in the 1950s. Nyaanga was respected in his village and clan because of his support to other villagers in planting tea and to find work in the tea plantations. So when he approached Bitutu's parents with the information that his former workmate Sauri wanted to marry their daughter they readily agreed. Together with Bitutu, Sauri has the following sons: Nyamira, Simeon, George, Nyamwari and Nyabicha. Their daughters are Moraa, Kemunto, Pauline, Jane, Kerubo and Nyaboke.

He married his second wife Ester Kemunto from Nyamanagu in 1966. This was after his first wife had given birth to three daughters. This made him lose hope of ever having sons with her but they were born later. He paid six cows and one goat for his second wife as bride price all of it accrued using his tea earnings. His sons with Esther are Ondieki, Isaac and Momanyi. The daughters are Alice and Mokeira. Sauri used to get most of his income from tea which occupies a significant portion of his land.

Sauri gets some additional income from thatching houses for people at a fee an occupation he has been in since 1959, although since 2000 contracts to thatch have become rare. This, he explained, is because of the rarity of grass for thatching owing to population pressure. The land previously left on grass has been turned to food and tea growing especially on the hill tops. Besides, many people prefer corrugated iron sheet roofs. Sauri also weaves baskets for sale. He specialises on baskets used for chicken raring and others for carrying green tea leaves to the buying centres. Because there are no forests from where to collect sticks for weaving baskets, he splits mature Napier grass canes and weaves with them.

He uses the extra income from thatching houses and selling baskets to supplement his tea earnings for use to buy food and largely for entertainment with the local brew *chang'aa* and *busaa* in the company of friends. He said that he sells his baskets at the village tea buying centre every end of the month when tea earnings have been released by KTDA. In June and December every year he sells many baskets at the main gate to Tombe tea factory next to the local office of Nyamira Tea SACCO office where tea farmers receive their mid and end year tea payments locally known as tea bonuses. Sauri said that when he is not plucking or weeding tea or thatching houses he occasionally gets contracts to make round mats using sticks at the homes of clients who smear them with cow dung and use them for drying maize grains. The clients provide him with lunch and local brew throughout the period of work there.

Sauri said that times have changed and the price for thatching a house nowadays ranges from Ksh 300 for the smallest house to Ksh 600 for a big one, unlike in the 1960s when they were paid Ksh 25–30. The owner of the house provides food for those thatching during the days that they work on his house. On the final day of work they feast as they have always done. The owner buys *busaa* for them if it is not made in his home and slaughters chicken for his friends and the thatchers. For Christians they only buy meat or slaughter chicken and they do not provide any beer. They may then give the thatchers money to buy the beer on their own.

Otwori, Sauri's instructor in thatching houses is no longer involved in this work because his eyesight deteriorated in the early 1980s. Mwoma his other trainer passed away in 1984. Since then Sauri has been doing the work on his own. As at the time of interview in 2004, he was working at Makori's home in Bogetaorio area. Makori had sent Sauri's nephew Daudi Oenga to inform him that there was work there to be done. He went there and negotiated the price for the work agreeing on Ksh 300. The amount of money charged was low because he was using broad grass called '*esasati*' and not the finer grass known as '*ekenyoru*', which is tedious to use in thatching roofs. The broad grass lasts for a short time and requires repairs hence, the lower price also. "*Once I finish thatching Makori's house, I will start on a new contract I have with Ombonyo at Sengereri*" he explained. The income from thatching houses have assisted him pay his children's fees and feeding the family. He also used the savings to buy iron sheets for his house. Sauri is a member of Onchera Self Help Group based in their village. He joined the group in 1995 with a membership fee of Ksh 50 and has been paying a monthly subscription of Ksh 30 ever since. Members of the group are allowed to borrow up to three times the total amount subscribed thus far at an interest rate of 1% per year. He said that loans from the group have assisted him and his family during emergencies such as hunger and sicknesses. The money he earned from the second tea payments in 2003 was used in buying food and other basic items for his family and to clear debts with Onchera Self Help Group which he incurred as a result of his first wife's hospital bill.

Sauri told us, "*Nowadays, I do not get regular contracts to thatch houses. When I get one, I usually work from 8 in the morning to about 1 o'clock in the afternoon. The contracts are not many because many people prefer to use iron sheets to roof their houses. Also, the population has increased and it is difficult to find enough grass and skilled people to thatch houses.*" He uses his thatching earnings to entertain himself with the local brew called *busaa* which he started taking in the company of his thatching mentors Otwori and Mwoma in the early 1960s as it was provided by the people whose houses they thatched.

Sauri indicated that he had not trained any of his sons in thatching houses because they were not interested in the job. His two sons Nyamira and Simeon were willing to learn, but they had a

problem of starting to drink very early in the day and becoming too unstable to climb to the roof to thatch. He feared that they might get accidents by falling from the rooftops while drunk, therefore he discouraged them from assisting him as well as learning the skill from him. Nyamira is a carpenter and Simeon is a houseboy. Sauri's youngest son Nyabicha wants to be a mason, therefore, he does not accompany his father to be taught thatching.

Members of Sauri's family attend Sengereri SDA Church. His sisters Kemuma and Nyanchera visit him often and he in turn visits them in their homes. Sauri told us that his sisters had planted tea in the late 1960s after they saw his tea farm and sought his assistance in preparing the land and acquiring seedlings. His brother Mamboleo who had also worked in the tea estates in Kericho planted his first tea crop in 1962. Recently Sauri was paid bride price of two cows and one goat for his daughter Kerubo. He was also given Ksh 100 by Michieka, the tea factory director representing our area, to buy medicine for his wife Bitutu who had an injury in the leg.

Sauri had sold one of the cows paid to him as his daughter's bride price for Ksh 5050 and used the money to buy dry maize for his two wives. The remaining amount he used to buy roofing iron sheets for his youngest son Nyabicha. Sauri said his son needed a house and using iron sheets was the easier way for him because grass was rare and expensive. He explained thus:

...usually thatching a house is a slow process unlike our counterparts who use iron sheets. They can complete three houses while I am still thatching one. Their pay is higher compared to what I am paid; however, my work is more than theirs. They take one day to complete roofing an average house while I take four days to complete thatching such a house.

Sauri liked his job as a thatcher because it really supplemented the income he gets from tea leaf. He explained that he also enjoys doing the work, arguing that if he does not do it, people who want grass thatched houses will suffer. Sauri maintained that thatching houses is taboo for women in Gusiland; it's purely a male occupation.

During another visit we found Sauri directing his cow to graze along the footpath leading to his home. He was taking the cow to a small portion of his land that has pasture. After exchanging greetings, we proceeded with him to the pasture where he tethered the cow to a wedge. He then led us back to his house. Outside the house we were met by his first wife Bitutu. After exchanging greetings she told us that she was hurt on her leg and had treated it using traditional herbs. She informed us that she made vertical cuts with a razor blade on the part of the leg that was sprained so that bad blood would flow out and applied ashes made from certain leaves.

Sauri welcomed us into the house. Inside the house there was a big dining table and six chairs. In one corner of the living room there was a wooden cupboard and next to it there was a 100 litre plastic container filled with water. On the open ceiling structure Sauri had kept bundles of split Napier grass canes ready for making baskets. Also on the ceiling structure were about ten newly made baskets waiting to be taken to the market. He told us that he bought a goat recently and it has now given birth to triplets and he is very happy. He had invested some of the money he had been getting from thatching houses and from tea leaf in buying the goat. The goat was feeding next to the grass-thatched house, which was used as the kitchen. He also told us that he has a few hens, and grows maize, bananas, and tea.

Sauri said that he used to own cattle acquired through tea earnings when his family was small and was fairly well off, able to feed his family and join other men regularly for a *busaa* drink, until his second wife had a protracted court case. The second wife had planted the outlawed marijuana so that she could sell it to educate her children. Then one day their neighbour, a Mr. Anyoka was caught by the police in possession of marijuana. When Anyoka was arrested he pointed to Sauri's second wife as the one planting it. So the police came and arrested her. That was in 1980. She was prosecuted and the case took a long time, costing the family a lot of money in travelling to see her in the cells and bribing the police and court officers. She was finally fined Ksh 3000 shillings. "*So that is why I sold the cattle and that was the start of poverty in this homestead.*" He explained that since then it had become difficult to accumulate cattle using tea earnings because of the increased consumptive

needs of the family that has grown. Besides that, his own tea earnings have declined over the years, and land for rearing cattle has also reduced due to subdivision for inheritance.

In 1999 Sauri's sons started to quarrel with him over their maintenance as they had no income sources and agitated for part of the tea farm to own. In 2001 he wanted to be baptised into the Adventist Church to avoid his sons who came to his house when drunk and made a lot of noise. He had figured out that if he was baptised they would fear to visit him while drunk as then he would be Christian. When he asked for baptism, the church pastor and other leaders demanded that before baptism, Sauri should settle struggles over land and tea by his wives and his sons. So he subdivided it to his two wives and subsequently to their several sons. This has left him with very few bushes (*emonga*) which he shares with his first wife. His income from tea leaves has dropped drastically since the land subdivision. Subdividing his land for inheritance has reduced his control over the second wife and her sons who do not assist him anymore. He has also apportioned himself the last end of the land cutting across the two wives' portions, where he has planted his blue gum trees. He sometimes sells these trees to cater for his basic needs and for the local brew drink.

His first wife plucks her own tea as well as Sauri's by herself while he goes thatching houses or drinking. When she does not have their tea she goes out to pluck tea at neighbours' farms and she is paid Ksh 4 per kilogram of tea leaf plucked. She brings the money home and buys necessities. Sauri occasionally gets contracts to thatch houses. A day after our interview he was scheduled to thatch one in the next village at a cost of Ksh 400. Both of Sauri's wives used to brew *busaa* for sale to supplement their tea incomes. They have since stopped because of aging and harassment from the administration and the police. He said the police officers could raid every two to three weeks and demand bribes of one to two thousand shillings each time. This discouraged his wives from the business as they were making losses. His sons could also take the beer without paying. Quarrels could ensue because of drinking. "*I am telling you it was bad. You could find people sleeping outside at night and most of them used to behave badly.*"

Sauri had some carpentry tools that he bought with earnings from tea and thatching houses. Earlier he used to make simple furniture for his household. His sons Simion and Nyamira were interested in carpentry and he gave them a full carpentry kit. His brother Mamboleo also assisted him with some tools to complete the kit. Simeon and Nyamira used to be good carpenters but due to alcohol influence they started selling the tools. Their father salvaged a few, which he hires out to carpenters who need them. With the fees he gets from hiring out the tools he has been able to purchase a table and soon the people with the tools will make for him a bed as payment in kind for using the tools.

His sons do come and visit him regularly, they come in the morning to say hello and if there is any problem it is shared and resolved. *“They help me occasionally with gifts, in fact Nyamwario gave me four shirts and Simeon also gave me a coat. I usually encourage them to work hard because the cost of living is rising day in day out. They are heavy drinkers though.”*

Sauri said that although he has apportioned (shown) his sons their land and the tea on it they have never thanked him. He also gave Simeon Ksh 4000 to pay his father-in-law as bride price and plans to give each of the remaining sons who have not paid their bride price, one cow each lest they get caught up in a situation like that facing Nyansara (Nyansara had not paid dowry for his second wife who is dead now). *“People have to come together and raise funds for the bride price at this time. It is a shame that even when his father-in-law comes to negotiate the bride price, there will be no feasting, no busaa as per custom because his daughter is dead.”*

Sauri explained that his sons were giving him problems as they did not go to school and get jobs and they did not learn any skills. Besides, he said the sons drink a lot of alcohol but do not have regular sources of income to finance the drinking and many times they turn to theft. He explained that at one time his son Simeon burnt Ogeto's house after a disagreement over beer. Sauri was forced by the owner of the house to rebuild and equip it as it was originally. He used his own resources from tea earnings and other such as trees to build it. He bought only grass for thatching, did the thatching on his own and bought a bed to furnish the house. It is the village elders who had decided that instead of arresting Simeon, his father should rebuild the house. That time

Simeon had run away. He also bailed out his son Evans who was about to be locked up in the police cells for stealing timber from the local dispensary. Sauri gave Ksh 200 to the local police who released him. Evans had stolen the timber to sell so that he could use the proceeds to drink *chang'aa*.

Sauri indicated to us that his daughters are good and they do come and visit him. On their visits they usually leave him with Ksh 20–50 for his own drink. He said he usually takes *busaa* with the money. Recently his sons-in-law came and gave him Ksh 3000 to assist him to take his wife to hospital when she had sprained her leg, but now she was healed using traditional herbs. He said the money will assist them in buying things at home and for his entertainment with *busaa*. His son-in-law Janai (Kerubo's husband) gave him two cows and a goat as dowry. He sold one to cater for expenses in sending millet ugali (*obokima*) to his daughter's parents-in-law as is the custom. He is left with one cow. He explained that his daughters have been very useful in reducing poverty in his home and making him live happily sharing whatever he gets with his friends.

Sauri says that though he takes a bit of *busaa* he was baptized into Sengereri SDA church in early 2004. He decided to go to church because his sons could come into the house when drunk and make a lot of noise. Since he started going to church they have stopped coming to his house in the evenings when drunk. They only come in the morning to say hello. In church they are taught to respect one another and humble themselves. Sauri explained that in the olden days, a boy could not drink beer as it is nowadays. There was respect among the people. Boys could not also wrestle their parents as it is happening nowadays. Things were cheap in the market unlike these days when everything one needs is very expensive. Beer was not for sale those days but was for free entertainment during *egasangio* (helping each other in turns at the farm or in building houses) or *risaga* (group work of all kinds) and during *chinyangi* (weddings) as well as when there were visitors in a home or as elders discussed issues. Sauri who built his main house at a cost of 700 shillings in 1978 using his tea bonuses says that things are different now as everything is very costly. Nowadays most of his monies are spent on foodstuffs.

Sauri lives with two of his grandchildren; a girl and a boy. His wife wanted the girl so that she could help her in the house and to fetch water. The boy was born here before his mother—Sauri's daughter—was married and has stayed with them since. Sauri indicated that because his mother has 'found a place' (euphemism for getting married), she will take him. He said that he paid for their school requirements and food.

One day we found Sauri seated on the roadside just near the entrance to Miriri Dispensary. On discussing with him we found out that he had brought tea leaf to sell to *soko buru* (the middlemen who buy tea leaves in cash and re-sell it to the private tea factories in the former White Highlands in the neighbouring Kericho District). Sauri like some other villagers sells mostly poor quality tea leaf that is not acceptable by the local tea factory to *soko buru* dealers. He also sells good quality tea leaf to the dealers when he needs quick money because they pay on delivery unlike the factory that pays once a month for all deliveries for the previous month. In December 2005 Sauri sold a small portion of his land to the local dispensary at Ksh 50,000. He gave some of the money to each of his two wives for their use and the balance he used to buy a cow.

Sauri belongs to the larger Bogisero clan where he is entitled to participate and contribute whenever there is a problem. He has lived peacefully with neighbours and fellow clansmen. Sometimes suspicion on grounds of witchcraft does arise. Allegations of witchcraft do arise and this brings animosity among the people. There are families that do not share anything.

Another day while still on fieldwork we found Mzee Sauri at his neighbour's place where there was *busaa*. He told us that he had just come from one of his thatching assignments and was just taking some drink before he could proceed to his home. We bid him bye as we were proceeding to another homestead down the hill.

Mzee Sauri believes that his life has not been successful because his children especially the sons are in serious problems. Some drink too much and others are thieves. None of the sons had paid bride price on their own initiative without being pestered and assisted by their father. They hardly ever offer him any help,

especially since he subdivided the land for them and their mothers. His perception was that subdivision of land caused his younger wife and her children to disown him. He felt that he no longer had any control over them.

3.1. Deploying the tea resource: Sauri's style

Sauri's life history is inter-twined with the history of tea in his village given that he was among the pioneer tea growers in the early 1960s. In fact Sauri had tried out tea planting on his own farm in the early 1950s long before tea growing was allowed in their area. Patroba and Sauri as well as many of the villagers who had previously worked in the Kericho tea plantations indicated that they had learned about tea husbandry at their places of work in the plantations. In planting tea long before processing and marketing channels were established locally, he was able to set up one of the earliest income generating activities in his village; that of home-made tea for sale to villagers. But in the later years Sauri was hardly involved in any community projects. He mainly assisted fellow clansmen when problems such as death arose and met them primarily as he drank his local brew *busaa*.

Therefore, soon Sauri was trapped in consumption without replenishment which undermined his livelihood and turned it quickly into a precarious undertaking. Sauri married two wives and thus spread his resources too thinly ending up with poor quality in children's education and other forms of investment and accumulation. Even as his resources were getting depleted he turned to local brew consumption early in life and perfected it by taking up a career in thatching and basketry which pushed him deeper into a vicious cycle of low earnings. In indulging in the local brew, Sauri enjoys the company of his age-mates but at the cost of his own welfare as scarce resources are wiped out.

Sauri also relied on his first wife to pluck the tea and to largely work the land for their survival. He did not apply himself in the tea farm with the same energy as he had done at the time of introducing the crop when he stood out in the village as a leading innovator. It was observed that his first wife was occasionally assisted by her last born son whenever he had no casual work outside the home. Sauri's labour for tea was organised around his

family excluding himself. He spent most of his time thatching houses and drinking. He however shared in the tea earnings and her first wife also occasionally shared in his earnings from thatching houses.

Besides using tea earnings to educate his children with little success, Sauri's is a case of a clogged tea resource moulding process. His children did not succeed in school and thus have not been helpful to him in his old age. The household slid from a position of relative affluence when he worked with tea plantations in Kericho in the 1950s to one of abject poverty in recent years. Part of the reason for this change of fortunes is that his children spent money in school but did not succeed and have fallen back on Sauri's shrinking tea farm to survive. Additionally, because of or in spite of the foregoing, Sauri did not use some of his tea earnings to extend his land or even venture into business to cushion himself from pressure on his ancestral land. These changing fortunes have led to intergenerational conflicts over tea and land, with his sons taking most of it leaving him in want. After subdividing land and tea for them, his second wife and her children have largely abandoned him. They do not share any resources on their part of his former farm with him and he has fallen back to his first wife for most of his needs. As his agility to thatch houses declines with age, Sauri is likely to fall deeper into poverty.

While other villagers displayed and pursued the desire to transition from tea farming to other high value businesses Sauri tried his hand in business by hiring out carpentry tools to carpenters and has been making some income. He also weaves baskets for sale. The baskets are used for carrying tea leaves around farms and to tea buying centres. His wives had also relied on *busaa* brewing and sales to earn some income over the years. The business failed due to raids by the local administration and police. Sauri had therefore not ventured in to business partnerships or business-oriented self-help groups like Patroba and others had. In a sense Sauri was shy of taking risks in group business activities. Most of his time was spent thatching houses and drinking his local brew *busaa*. It is perhaps, in order to service his *busaa* adventures that Sauri delivered some of his tea to *soko*

buru (middlemen) who paid for it in cash rather than to the factory that paid more but on a monthly basis.

4. Varied Socio-Cultural Dispositions and Livelihood Outcomes

The two life histories put to test arguments (such as by Bates, 1989; Sachs, 2005) that cash cropping constitute ladders up to successful livelihoods. Both men owned much the same acreage of tea bushes, but the outcomes of their lives are markedly different; Sauri turning in a verdict of not successful and Patroba one of success. For his success Patroba had pursued frugality and accumulation in terms of land and tea expansion while Sauri's relative misery appears to be explained by his spendthrift tendencies as evidenced by his regular consumption of the local brew, *busaa* and *changaa*. But Sauri is not a hungry person, he is not isolated from social life in the village and he participates in the market in significant ways. His discussion of failure in life touches on the lives of his grown children, his relations with them and his spouses as well as his shrinking control over productive resources.

Sauri's description of limited success brings to light a locally embedded view of life via extended family. If the larger family is in need, the individual member also is. For instance, Sauri ably pursued his daily life through income from tea, basket sales and thatching services. With three streams of income, Sauri was certainly a well to do person at individual level. However, in evaluating his life, he looked at it in totality to include his children and wives as well as existing intra-family relationships. This line of thought takes the notion of livelihood beyond individual welfare and comfort to include the quality of social relationships, power and control over other people, respect by other people and the welfare of an actor's larger family and close relations.

In ordinary village discourse it was common for people talk of their fully grown offspring as if they were toddlers. Parents never get out of parenting; they care and attempt to provide for their adult children who are often better off. This explains why Patroba paid school fees and often bought clothing for his son's

children. This reciprocal, even symbiotic relationship between parents and their grown up offspring's families is common in daily village life. The relationships are not just based on resources sharing or exchange, but much more about intergenerational respect and service. The older generation prefer being consulted for advice and direction on major decisions, even those such as purchasing a personal car that should not ordinarily concern them. It satisfies older people if their offspring of whatever age and education appear to value their views and support. This evidence support Sachs' argument (Stewart, 2004: 536) for a holistic view of social change by pointing out that "*development economics cornered itself by looking at too limited a range of issues.*"

Tea as a resource at the disposal of villagers was moulded differently by different actors. To some it presented opportunities for entertainment with the local brew *busaa*, while others latched on it to accumulate and invest in land purchases, livestock, children's education and businesses. Some of those who perceived tea earnings as for entertainment with *busaa* were observed to keep their options open. They rarely worked on the tea unless pay day was nigh—spouses and children routinely worked on the tea but hardly shared in the income. In this type of life style, tea is a contested resource. The 'big man' such as Sauri that routinely reaps the benefits, decides where the tea will be sold depending on immediate needs for cash money to finance entertainment. When in need of quick cash, the green tea leaves are sold at a low price to middlemen who pay on delivery. When relatively liquid financially for entertainment, the green leaves are sold to the KTDA at higher prices paid at the end of each month. These scenarios lead to hidden resistance from the less powerful in the arrangement to the extent that some women were found to run secret KTDA registrations to enable them siphon their husband's tea and cushion themselves from their economic highhandedness.

In another type of life style, tea as a resource unifies households. For instance, in Patroba's case, the tea is sold exclusively to KTDA which offers the highest possible returns. His children's education and their marriage are organised around the tea earnings either directly or indirectly via intra-household support among siblings who are products of the tea in economic terms. In this life style the initial trust breeds more consistent

inter-generational trust, valuation and respect, to the extent that a symbiotic relationship exists within and between generations. This essentially points to a successful livelihood.

In the same way as tea originated with the interaction of local actors with White Settlers based in the tea plantations in the neighbouring Kericho District, so has the transformation of the green tea leaves into income. Some green tea leaves are sold for cash to *soko buru* dealers (middlemen) who in turn sell it to tea plantation factories in Kericho and Bomet Districts. Most tea is sold to the KTDA for processing and export. The KTDA pays for the tea on a monthly basis. The final payment to farmers for the tea delivered during any one year to the KTDA depends on political and economic conditions in Pakistan, Britain and Egypt, three of the most important export markets of Kenyan tea. Therefore, life in Sengereri Village is closely linked or at least affected by such global issues as the war on terrorism, security and stability in the Middle East. Tea production and marketing takes local efforts at village and factory level as well as international conditions in the export market. For this reason among others there is tension and suspicion between farmers' groups and the KTDA especially involving tea and fertilizer pricing.

Concluding remarks

This article has shown that tea growing in the study area originated with labour migration to the former 'White Highlands' of Kericho District. The migrants learnt tea husbandry there, developed interest and directly or indirectly raised the requisite resources including knowledge to set up the tea enterprise on their farms. Thus the KTDA extension service complemented the process of tea development in the area rather than originate it.

As a resource in the hands of villagers, tea has been moulded differently by different actors to earn living with equally varied outcomes. Some actors have used tea earnings to educate their children, provide for family and household as well as partake in community life successfully to the extent that they entered into the sphere of accumulation in land, tea and livestock. This success appears to be hinged on a disciplined livelihood style that

emphasized children's education, adherence to Christianity and accumulation.

Tea has also failed other actors who followed other livelihood styles. A common livelihood style that appeared to lead to limited success in life encompassed polygamy, conspicuous consumption of local brew and weak involvement in community life. Tea earnings are thus quickly consumed through food purchases and local brew, which appeared to permeate from parents to children in this livelihood style with the result of disorganising the next generation.

Within the various livelihood styles tea constituted an arena of contest. There were intra-household struggles for control of tea earnings as well as village level (and beyond) contests and negotiation for the control of 'stolen tea' at the tea buying centre. A key group of beneficiaries were 'ghost farmers' who reaped where they had not sown, but whose sway in the smallholder tea sub-sector cannot be ignored.

Overall, tea comes across as a socially constructed resource embedded in local social reality and continually being re-worked to service a variety of livelihoods including those of *bona fide* farmers, 'ghost farmers', casual farm workers, tea buying centre clerks and others all driven or at the ebbs of varied socio-cultural dispositions. Tea also formed the loci of a variety of social networks including families, lineages, cooperative societies, self help groups, local brew clubs and business partnerships. Tea is thus at the centre of village life in the study area.

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Communication sites for the poor: the case for Sengereri Village, Nyamira District

Catherine Nyameino¹

Introduction

Communication is a major asset in any system and relevant information is much sought after by the literate and the illiterate, the rich and the poor. Recognition of information as a resource in the rural areas is overt. The rural people are always proactively looking for ways of communicating to each other; how they acquire new local and global information and how they pass on the information they hold. This quest is aimed at effective communication. But what is communication?

Communication has been defined differently by different people. Some define communication as a process of sending information from a sender to a receiver (Shannon and Weaver, 1949). Beltran (1974: 13) sees communication as a process of transmission of modes of thinking, feeling, and behaving from one or more persons to another person or persons. In this model, the notion of persuasion is very important and the element of responding is equally important to enable the sender adjust to the expectations of the receiver. This model assigns an actively predominant role to the sender and a passive one to the receiver. However, Hiebert sees communication as an interactive process that works in a circular, dynamic and ongoing way (Hiebert *et al.*, 1985), where there are no permanent senders and receivers as the roles of sending and receiving change hands depending on who is talking and who is listening.

Fiske (1990: 19, 37) on the other hand argues that communication is the production and exchange of meaning. In

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other words it is the structural relationship between the sender and the receiver. That a receiver decodes messages by use of codes that are common in a particular culture, and therefore creates meanings that are similar or opposed to the sender's intended meaning.

Development on the other hand has been defined as a widely participatory process for social change in society, intended to bring about both social and material advancement for the majority of people through their gaining greater control over their environment (Rogers, 1975: 345–358). Development communication is therefore the application of the process of communication to the development process. It is the use of the principles and practice of exchange of ideas for the advancement of development objectives (*ibid*).

It has therefore been argued that development communication plays two roles; one is the transformational role through which it seeks social change in the direction of higher quality of life and social justice. The second role is socialization through which it strives to maintain some established values of society that are consonant with development. In playing these roles, development communication creates an enhancing atmosphere for exchange of ideas that produce a balance in social and economic advancement between physical outputs and human relationships. (Moemeka, 1991: 18).

This implies that one cannot divorce communication from development because as Mathur (1994: 1) notes, communication is an essential resource in facilitating social change by increasing an understanding of the effects of such a change on life, on society including its economy and its culture.

A lot of emphasis has been laid on the impact of mass media on the audience. Priest (1996: 49) states that issues that are prominent in the media become prominent in the minds of the audience. Okolo (1994) states that no reader of African newspapers will fail to notice that many issues for public discussion by people always originate from coverage provided by media.

Most of the communication theories stress on the role and impact of mass media in society. That media have generally shaped the thinking and way of life of people, and that people entirely

depend on media to make day to day decisions. The agenda setting theory, for instance, postulates that media have the ability to influence the public's perception of the important issues of the day. The gate-keeping theory also supports the all powerful media as it argues that the journalist and newsmen determine what they release to the public. That each individual in the news gathering process acts as a gate to either allow certain information to pass or withhold it. The two-step flow theory however discounts that media are that powerful by introducing the element of opinion leaders, who by virtue of their positions in society influence people. These opinion leaders receive media messages and in turn formulate their opinions on those messages and pass the information to less interested and poorly informed people. In this case then, media do not influence people directly (Black and Bryant, 1995: 55).

The uses and gratifications theory also counters the all powerful media by arguing that audiences are goal directed and choose what to take from media and that that which they choose to take is that which will benefit them in one way or another. This again means that the audience is not passive but rather actively engages in the choice of the content.

Communication is therefore crucial in any discourse as it is the vehicle through which information is disseminated and appropriate responses received; and while it is very important in all sectors of society, it is much more important in rural development as the majority of the population in Africa still live in the rural areas. Development communication helps people to examine issues on the basis of knowledge and information and enables them to be involved and to participate in the planning and implementation of development policies and programmes that are aimed at bringing about change in their own lives and in their society.

Everyone has a right to communicate. The right to communicate aims at encouraging and promoting the largest possible amount of participation and feedback (Ansah, 1996: 188). Rural development is about people's participation in making decisions that affect them, which means that the poor must have a forum through which they can express themselves and share ideas.

The literature available however, indicates that communication among the poor has not been adequately addressed. There are gaps in the literature as a lot of focus is on formal communication systems and how those at the centre of society communicate amongst themselves, and to the poor at the peripheries. Information seems to be originating from the rich and the poor are only recipients of the same. This is in spite of the fact that the information that the rich communicate to the poor should resonate from the poor themselves as it is the poor who understand their needs better.

Little is known about the communication alternatives devised by the population who live in the rural areas of Kenya; who may not have access to the mass media facilities such as, newspapers, radios and televisions for reception of messages. Mathur (1994: 43) notes that even when those facilities are available they are mainly one way in communication allowing only a few individuals to convey a message to an audience of many; and because these communication technologies are relatively expensive, only the socio-economic elite can afford them. This in essence implies that information flows from the rich to the poor, as it is the rich who can afford or own the media facilities. There is therefore a wide information gap between the poor and the rich, yet there is a greater need of development messages among the poor.

Mathur also notes that communication is key in development and implementation of policies and programmes aimed at the well being and welfare of people everywhere; and that it must involve people who are the ultimate beneficiaries. This in essence means that any development programmes that are aimed at the people must be communicated by the people's representatives. It further implies that if the process of communication excludes the people whom the messages target, then the messages will not effectively serve their intended meaning.

Studies have also shown that there is a strong correlation between communication and development; that the more people are exposed to messages through media or otherwise, the more there are indicators of development. However, it is not just mere exposure to messages that bring change, rather, it is the psychic

mobility or empathy, raising aspirations, teaching of new skills, and encouraging local participation that bears fruit.

Research problem

There is ample evidence in the literature that the rural development is very important. However, communication which is the key means of passing the development messages to the rural poor is lacking, as the available means of communication favour the rich more, in terms of formulation of messages, and accessibility to equipment. Hence, communication to the poor is a top down affair, where the rich talk down to the poor as they formulate messages that do not necessarily meet the needs of the poor. For instance, while a number of the rural poor may have access to radio sets, and occasionally listen to programmes that are relevant to their needs, there is a lack of an organized response system in place. So their questions or comments in regard to particular issues that may arise from a certain program content do not reach the program producers. What then happens in this case is that the producers keep sending information to the same audience with no idea as to how that audience benefits from the information, and they therefore cannot structure the content to suit the felt needs of that particular. Due to this gap, the poor have devised ways of getting information that is relevant to their need and that provides instant feedback.

It is also important to note that while the main communication systems in place have not adequately addressed the information needs of the rural people, the rural populations have devised ways of filling their information gaps by ways that from a casual observation may be mere idle talk.

This paper attempts to argue that while the mass media have a big role to play by way of defining realities and setting agenda for the masses, by virtue of their reach- effectiveness and wider access to both the gathering and dissemination of information, traditional methods of communication, especially the use of opinion leaders is still a viable and relevant method of communication among the poor. This could be because it is either more accessible, or more reliable and costs less or nothing sometimes to access information. This means that despite the

limited resources that people in rural areas have to access information, they have devised their own ways to keep them abreast of the latest information on social and political issues as well as acquiring information on new innovations. What however varies is the amount of information that can be gathered and shared at village level.

In support of traditional systems of communication, Des Wilson in Okigbo (1996: 92, 94) argues that traditional systems remain what essentially sustains the information needs of the ruralities which represent over 70% of the national population of most of third world countries. This is because traditional systems are trusted and the majority of the people seem to believe in what comes out of them and usually to supplement them with whatever additional information may filter through opinion leaders about events elsewhere.

Methodology

Fieldwork was carried out at Sengereri Village in Nyamira District, Kenya from January 2004 to June 2005. The gist of the field work was collecting life histories of villagers with a view to locating the communication processes and modes around them. These data were supplemented with observations and key informant interviews. Vignettes from the life histories are central to data presentation and analysis in this paper.

1. Information and Communication at Village Level

The study established that villagers rely heavily on each other for information needs. The forums vary but word of mouth seems to be the dominant model through which information is passed on and ideas exchanged.

People talked about how they sought to come together to exchange ideas, how they communicated with each other, how they learned new things and how they accessed global and national news, as well as village 'gossip.' It was clear among villagers that they needed information to make things work well, and news and gossip in order to belong and participate better in society.

However, people sought information and news differently in the villages. The sites at which villagers access information and exchange ideas are many and vary depending on the relevance and appropriateness to different people. Each site is identified and considered below.

1.1. At the shops

Small shopping centres are a common feature in rural areas. This is where one also finds tea buying centres and sometimes small health clinics as well as open markets where allsorts of merchandise is displayed and sold. There are also scheduled days in a week when the open market is fully operational and traders from all over the locality display their goods. These shopping centres serve as a meeting point for the rural folk as they converge to buy and sell goods during market days and also on the other days, both young and old men sit outside shops to catch up on the latest news.

One would find people who own radio sets coming along with them to the shops and they listen to the radio in groups and discuss the events as they unfold. Sometimes the shops are dotted along major paths, and they too serve as a meeting point for people to exchange ideas. Going to the shopping centre after work is almost a way of life for most people. Sometimes they may not have a specific reason such as buying or selling, but sitting and chatting with friends outside some shop is very satisfying. Most of the people who do not drink spend a lot of time at the shopping centres.

Benjamin: “Nowadays, we do our various tasks in the morning, after lunch, I take a bath and go to the shopping centre to catch up on the latest news or gossip from my age mates and friends. I usually do not miss going to funerals, whether it is for a neighbour, a relative or friend. I go there to console them. I am also a good cook. Wherever there are parties like weddings around, I am usually put in charge of cooking. I learnt this when I was young as my mother had passed away and at Kisii Youth Centre. People recognized my abilities in cooking so they like me supervising”.

Benjamin spends time to work, catch up on the latest news and gossip at the shops, attend funerals and donate his culinary skills at parties in the village. This is typical of village life. In some homes there may not be a radio and in the majority there are no televisions. Besides, many people who know how to read can not afford newspapers. Many go to the shopping centres to get news by word or mouth, by listening to radios there, as shopping centres are enclaves of affluence in some villages and to catch up on gossip. In many instances village gossip is not negative, it is village news by word of mouth, and it can not reach in any other form.

Funerals have also become important venues for sharing information. Apart from the usual consolation messages to the bereaved family by relatives and friend, government officials have also found funeral venues to be convenient in passing important information on HIV/and Aids for instance, and for highlighting other issues that affect people. It is not uncommon to hear the local chief warn people about local brews or crime. Even politicians take the chance to talk about politics. All these serve as sources of information to the rural people.

1.2. At drinking venues

These are normally homes within the village where local brews are prepared by experts and are sold at affordable prices. Local brewing and drinking venues are also sources of information both local and international as those who drink are also from diverse backgrounds. Here, one would find people in formal employment such as teachers or clerks or other officers in government and private employment drinking together with the rural peasants. The drinking venues are open daily and most of those who drink do it after work mostly in the afternoons. This particular time is also appropriate as most people are done with the day's work and are therefore in no hurry to leave, while those who may have traveled to the local town return home to join their friends in the drinking venues, and here information is shared. If one had bought a newspaper in the morning, it goes round amongst those who know how to read and write. Here again interpretation of the newspaper content is shared, and the usual gossip continues.

Nyakundi: on another visit, I found Nyakundi resting outside his house after coming back from church. After greeting each other he offered me a chair that his daughter Nyarinda had brought from inside the house. As we started talking his wife Nyasuguta came and explained to him about the health condition of his brother Changamwe's wife who was unwell and whom she had gone to visit after church.

Okong'o drinks the local brew called busaa. He said the busaa drink satisfies him just like porridge does and serves the purpose of food by making his stomach full. He mostly takes it in the company of his friends as part of socializing. He says "*sharing the little I have with others is a blessing*". While drinking in the company of others they exchange ideas.

Nyakundi uses his drink of *busaa* as a forum to exchange ideas with friends and other villagers. But he had also sent his wife to see his brother-in-law who was sick. Word of mouth appears to be crucial in Nyakundi's style of accessing information. The range of topics covered in exchanges with friends over drinks is not clear, but this forum appears almost permanent in village cycles and one through which a lot of information and news percolates.

1.3. At Chief's *baraza*

Baraza are formal village meetings that are organized by the village headmen upon request from the chief. They are basically forums for passing information from the government as well as sharing on issues that affect that particular community or village. So in a typical *baraza* one would find a government representative who is a chief, sub-chief, or a village headman or sometimes a councilor. It is here where information on HIV/Aids, the latest farming methods, and any other information from the government is passed.

Baraza are also used to arbitrate disputes between neighbours or clans. Agricultural extension officers are from time to time given an opportunity to address a larger group of people in a *baraza* as opposed to meeting with individuals. This is a very

effective way of passing information at the village level and government machineries exploit this kind of forum.

Julius: Julius said that whenever he is at home, he attends the chief's *baraza* (public meetings) where they are taught about modern farming. The chief also arbitrates disputes arising out of disagreement over land boundaries. But mostly after work on the farm Julius said he spends his time at home taking care of his cattle. *“Sometimes I go to the road to catch up on the latest news and developments. We usually gather at the dispensary (gate) to chat and exchange news and relax”.*

Julius at 60 years of age attends chief's *baraza* (public meetings) where he learns about modern farming. It is common in the villages for extension staff to latch on to chiefs in order to reach farmers in *barazas* for group extension messages. Once they have offered this information they follow up with individuals on their respective farms. The curious thing however, is that Julius makes efforts to go to the road and gather at the dispensary gate to chat, exchange news and relax. This means that some villagers make deliberate efforts to get specific or general information. This again demonstrates how important information is to the rural poor.

A casual outsider observation in the study villages would indicate that many people come out of their homes to lurk along the roads and idle about in certain points. But from inside observation people come out to seek information which they consider critical to their lives. Some people come out in the morning on certain days soon after feeding their cattle while others who might be plucking tea in the morning come out in the afternoons. It is mostly men who seek information on the roads and shopping centres. Women appear to get it in their rotational savings' clubs or at the water points and posho mills.

1.4. Directly engaged with agricultural extension staff

The peasants in rural areas of Kenya engage directly with agricultural extension officers for information on farming. The extension officers are government employees of Ministry of

Agriculture or those employed by Kenya Tea Development Agency (KTDA). Their main work is to help farmers improve their food production as well as tea husbandry. The extension officers visit individual farmers and they sometimes use one's farm for demonstration. These officers introduce improved varieties and livestock and help them to adopt improved farming methods. The major handicap however is that the agricultural extension officers are thinly spread over a large number of farmers and effective communication is hampered by poor training in interpersonal techniques for predominantly illiterate target groups.

Daniel: Turning to technical knowledge on agriculture, Mokaya told us that their agricultural officer usually comes around the villages and advises them on the best methods of farming more especially on the need to use more fertilizers to the tea. He said that he has received very useful information on passion fruit production from a friend called Nyansinga who is also a fruit grower who comes and tells him about how best to plant passion fruits. He also said that his neighbour Henry Otundo has a cell phone and they use it to send messages to their son Janai who is stays in Nairobi.

Daniel on his part has stayed in touch directly with the agricultural extension officer for technical agricultural information. However, it appears that extension officer visits to his farm are far between or subject oriented, so that he found helpful information from his friend on passion fruit growing. His neighbour usually allows him to use his cell phone to reach his son in Nairobi. Daniel therefore creatively moulds his friendship into technical information on passion fruit production as well as into a communications service to reach his son.

2. Conclusion and Implications for Research and Policy

The critical point about village information and communication is that formal channels are weak and informal ones

robust. What might appear to outsiders as idle talk among villagers are normally serious news and information exchange sessions that are critical to village everyday life. In particular, word of mouth remains an important form of communication in the villages. Some times leisure activities form part of the forums for serious communication and at other times people converge by the road sides, shops and market centres to talk to others and to access village and global news. In this regard a village kiosk may start not on purely business principles, but as a meeting point for village discussion and news exchanges.

The role of opinion leaders is clearly marked out. Their work is to receive and correlate information for their fellow village men. So they interpret information from radio and newspapers as well as information from the villages. They give meaning to daily ordinary events and turn them into newsworthy information. Because they are listened to on account of their ready access to radios and newspapers, the slant they give the news upon sharing it with other villagers is critical to every day life in the village.

The two-step flow theory supports the information and communication model at village level. Black and Bryant (1995: 55) indicate that media transmit messages to opinion leaders who formulate opinions and then pass them to less interested and more poorly informed people. This then implies that much of the power and influence of the media lies on the ideology, inclination and abilities of the opinion leaders to consistently and reliably relay the messages. It is to these opinion leaders that the rural folk associate with to catch up with the latest news, and also learn new technologies to enable them survive.

It is imperative that rural communication methods are more seriously thought out to facilitate the implementation of development programmes in these areas. This reorientation should build on existing methods that are most accessible, and available and suitable to pass information. The resultant methods would thus be based on everyday lives of the rural people, because communication among the rural poor is seamlessly interwoven with daily living.

It is important for development communication experts to look for ways of exploiting these channels so as to reach their

targets. They should also involve the rural people in coming up with communication strategies that are relevant to their needs. Rural communication methods should be entrenched to the main communication methods so as to effectively address the growing communication gap between those at the centre and at the peripheries.

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