

5

Small and medium-size towns in Kenya: Three examples

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Nyeri: a town on the slopes of Mt. Kenya

Geographical characteristics

Nyeri is one of the key towns on the slopes of Mt. Kenya, approximately 160 kilometres from Nairobi. The town covers an area of about 200 square kilometres with difficult terrain characterized by steep slopes or valleys. Generally, Nyeri District experiences equatorial type of climate with two rainfall seasons. The long rains occur from March to May and the short rains from October to December, the amount received varying from place to place. Notably, rainfall and temperature have a strong influence on agricultural pattern in the hinterland of Nyeri town. Areas with moderate rainfall and temperatures grow both food and cash crops, while areas with least rainfall mainly grow subsistence and drought resistant crops.

Historical background

The reason for the establishment of the present Nyeri town dates back to as early as 1902. Then, the people of Tetu reportedly fought off a caravan of Indian looters who, while masquerading as traders, raided the people of Tetu. The colonialists subsequently imposed a heavy fine of thousands of cattle, goats and sheep on the repulsive Tetu people for having taken firm defense action against them. However, the Tetu people defied the order of paying the imposed fine. This triggered a military expedition to the area by the colonialists. The first troop

to arrive in the area pitched their tents at a site in Nyeri where the offices of the Provincial Commissioner are currently situated. At the site, the troops dug an eight-foot moat with a 60-foot radius, locally known as '*munyiri mukaró*', around the fortification to ward off any attack by the people of Tetu.

The Tetu people's forces went on a spirited attempt to repulse the "invaders". However, the situation calmed down following the subjugation of the local people. The aggressors then decided that the centre of their "brutal" operations should be given a name and made a permanent station. Following an agreement between the groups, the place was named Nyeri¹ on December 6, 1906. On 5th May 1911 Nyeri was gazetted as a township. A year after, the town became the administrative capital of Nyeri District and also the headquarters of the Kenya Province of the East African Protectorate. The Kenya Province constituted only a small portion of what is today the Republic of Kenya. It was in 1913 that the old town borders were established, remaining Nyeri town's borders for next sixty years. In 1927, the railway reached Kiganjo, which had been chosen as the Nyeri railway station both due to its topographical advantages and its proximity to the settlers farmlands which had developed to the north, after the 1912 relocation of the original Maasai inhabitants to areas around Narok (Kenya, 2002a).

After the Kenya Colony boundaries were changed, Nyeri town became the capital of Kikuyu Province in 1924. More changes occurred and in 1933, Nyeri became the capital of the then Central Province, which included Nanyuki, Meru to the North, Nairobi to the south and Machakos and Kitui areas to the east. This remained the case until the boundary revisions in 1965, when Nyeri remained the administrative capital of much smaller central region and the then Central Province. In June 1954, Nyeri urban district council was created. It was a structure whose function was to assist the District Commissioner, and exercised its functions in Nyeri, Kiganjo and Mweiga. In 1963 however the urban council assumed a representative nature with election of councillors. Nyeri town fully became a municipality in May 1971, when the first mayor was elected.

Population

In 1999, the population of Nyeri town was estimated at 106,695 people, of which 52,047 were male while 54,648 were female. In the year 2000 the population was estimated to have increased to 109,789 people. In the year 2005, the municipality's population was projected to increase to 126,662 persons. According to age and sex population projections, men less than 20 years are more than female population in the same age bracket. However the population of female between 20 and 80 years of age are more than men in the same age category. This may be attributed to out-migration of males in search for employment. Temporary or permanent migration to and from Nyeri town is common. Migration to Nyeri is common with people moving from the surrounding rural areas in search of employment or business opportunities or by people who supply the town with various agricultural and industrial goods.

Infrastructure

Nyeri town has a total road network of approximately 422 kilometres, of which 22.3 kilometres (5.3 per cent) are bitumen surfaced, 54.3 kilometres (12.8 per cent) are gravel surfaced while 346 kilometres (81.9 per cent) are unsurfaced earth roads. Maintenance of some of the unsurfaced roads in Thika town is done by the Kenya Urban Transport Infrastructure Project (KUTIP). Eighty per cent of the roads within the municipality that are maintained by the council are earth roads, which become impassable during the rains.

The Nyeri Water and Sanitation Company (NYEWASCO), a success story on privatization of water and sanitation services in Kenya, provides adequate water to a large percentage of the town's population. The main source of water is Chania river with its headwaters on the Aberdare (Nyandarua) mountains with a 98 per cent reliable flow of about 27,560 cubic metres a day against a present abstraction of about 8,000 cubic metres a day. The town's sewer system covers mainly the densely built up areas. The network comprises of sewage collection system and sewage treatment works.

Small and medium-size towns in Kenya

Most of the solid waste is generated in the commercial part of Nyeri town by hotels, shops, the three municipal council markets and the three bus parks. Residential areas contributing to solid waste include, Blue Valley, Kimathi, Mumbi, Kangemi and King'ong'o estates. The satellite shopping centres of Kiganjo, Kamakwa and Ruringu also generate a considerable amount of refuse, which if not collected, would create nuisance in the areas. Other institutions that produce considerable refuse include the Kiganjo Police Training College, the provincial headquarters in Nyeri and the Provincial General Hospital. Refuse is collected by the municipal council though NYEWASCO collects the charge on behalf of the council. This is because residents pay for waste disposal as part of their water bill.

Nyeri town has a number of health facilities, most of them privately owned. The largest of them is Nyeri District Hospital, supplemented by two other privately owned hospitals. The town is also well served by educational and training facilities. The private sector has in particular invested heavily in providing these facilities. Primary and secondary schools are evenly distributed across the municipality compared to other institutions which are concentrated mainly in the central business district.

Economic activities and employment

Nyeri is an agricultural town and most of its economic activities are tied to agriculture. Surrounded by land suitable for cultivation, the town benefits from fresh products supplied from the peri-urban and nearby rural areas. This has led to a sustainable interdependence between the town and the hinterland. Besides, Nyeri town has been unfortunate in attracting heavy industries, which could have contributed to meaningful industrial growth in spite of the fact that the town is well served by both national and international trunk roads. A few light industries exist in the municipality such as Mt Kenya Bottlers, Maisha Flour Millers, Aberdare Maize Millers, Highlands Mineral Water, a bakery and Kenya Cooperative Creameries at Kiganjo. According to information available from the council's revenue office, Nyeri town has over 5,600 small and medium-scale commercial enterprises. In addition, the town has about 10 banks, 16 insurance companies

and 14 insurance brokers. The town is also well served by various categories of hotels and restaurants, estimated to be about 1,090 in number.

Nyeri District also makes a considerable amount of earnings from tourism, particularly from its hotels, lodges, national parks, spectacular water falls and campsites. The district hosts two renowned parks, the Aberdare and Mt Kenya, with a variety of wildlife, which attract many visitors each year. Apart from the wildlife the two parks also offer unique scenery, which attracts film-makers. Tourist attraction in the district has stimulated the growth of handicraft industry in Nyeri town and therefore integrating tourism with other sectors in the town.

The town has four markets run by the municipal council. Three of the markets are in the central business district of the town while the other one (King'ong'o) is relatively new and is located in a residential area. The three markets located in the central business district include an open air market mainly for vegetables, soko mjinga which is a wholesale and retail market, and the oldest enclosed market constructed in the 1960s.

Municipal Council of Nyeri

The Municipal Council of Nyeri is divided into 15 wards, each represented by an elected councillor. In addition, there are five nominated councillors making the total number of policy makers in the council twenty. The fifteen wards are: Mathari, Kihatha/Gitathi-ini/Kamakwa, Mt Kenya, Chania, Kiganjo, Ngonde, Majengo, Kimathi, Gatitu South, Gatitu North, Marua/Githiru/Muruguru, Karia/Giaichamwenge, Kirichu/Gachika, Blue Valley/Kangemi and Nyaribo. The services provided by the municipality include: infrastructure (roads, street lights, drainage); social amenities; educational facilities; fire fighting; urban planning; provision of low cost rental housing; burial services (cemeteries), etc.

The municipality has 340 permanent employees who are working within the council's four departments. Casuals are normally employed on need basis, mainly in the cleansing or road maintenance sections. Given its functions, the Municipal Engineer's department employs a large proportion of the workers. The municipality's local sources of income include: property, land and area rates

Small and medium-size towns in Kenya

(including interest and penalties, if levied), plot rents, single business permits, markets and slaughter house receipts, vehicle parking receipts, house rents, surveying and money from NYEWASCO. Besides the local sources, the council gets money from the central government in terms of contribution in lieu of rates (CILOR), road maintenance levy fund (RMLF) and local authorities transfer funds (LATF). Contrary to the recommended proportion, about 60 per cent of the municipality's total revenue is spent on salaries.

The main problems faced by the municipality in term of urban management are the lack of financial resources, lack of specific skills (i.e. the municipality does not have a town planner) and bureaucracy. Due to financial constraints the council has only one grader, old refuse collection vehicles and lack fire services. Bureaucracy is also a problem in that local authorities must seek approval from the Ministry of Local Government for almost everything that they plan to do. In addition, some activities involve the participation of and contribution from several ministries. As such projects take a long time to be approved and implemented, even though the council may have played its part well and on time. It is important to note that even with these problems, Nyeri municipality currently holds the national trophy for cleanliness—an indicator of their efforts towards good urban management practices.

Thika: a satellite and industrial town near Nairobi

Geographical characteristics

Thika town is located in Thika District in Central Province of Kenya and is the administrative headquarters of Thika District. The town lies between the Chania and Thika rivers and is approximately 47 kilometres north east of Nairobi City, at an altitude of between 1,420 and 1,550 metres above sea level. The municipality covers an area of 220.2 square kilometres, with a central business district of 93 square kilometres. The municipality has two locations, Thika Town and Gatuanyaga. Notably, Thika is one of the satellite towns to Nairobi city. It is both an urban and a rural centre given that much of the surrounding land is agricultural. However, much of Thika municipality is urban, and it houses many of the big industries in

the country. Due to its location at the foot of Nyandarua ranges and a rich agricultural hinterland, the town enjoys relatively good climatic conditions most of the year.

Historical background

According to information found in the Thika Environmental Development Plan (Kenya, 1999), Thika became a town council in 1924 and a municipal council in 1963. The town started in the 19th century as a small market centre. Thika District Development Plan (Kenya, 2002b) indicates that by 1913, the market was well established with shops despite the fact that it had little effect on commercial development within the region. During the colonial period in the early 20th century, the town hosted the British settlers who were establishing coffee and sisal plantations in the area (Kenya, 1999). Thika rapidly grew during the 1950s when an ambitious government programme included it as one of the potential growth centres for industrial expansion. From a small centre with a few hundred people, Thika had a population of about 15,000 people by 1963. Today, Thika's population continues to grow.

Population

Thika town is a densely populated area. According to the 1999 population and housing census, the municipality had 106,707 persons (Kenya, 2001a) and by 2002, the town was projected to have a population of 116,461 persons. Thika municipality's population is expected to continue increasing as the district's population increases. The age structure for the people of Thika depicts a situation where males below the age of 25 years are more than their female counterparts. However, the population of females from the age of 25 and above is more than their male counterparts. It can be argued that many men move out of Thika to search for opportunities outside the district. Life expectancy is about 58 years for women and 53 years for men, with a possibility that the figure may have reduced as a result of the impact of HIV/AIDS.

Small and medium-size towns in Kenya

Given the number of industries located in Thika, the town acts as one of the destinations for most immigrants in search of job opportunities. An analysis of migration patterns in Kenya identified Thika as one of the towns having the highest number of immigrants (Kenya, 2001b). Between 8 to 10 per cent of the population comprise of recent migrants. Furthermore, the town hosts more people during the day than in the evenings. Much of the migration is temporally in nature and is practiced mainly by people from the neighbouring districts including Nairobi. Many of the people in this category are either self employed or formally employed.

Infrastructure

Thika town and the entire Thika District are generally well served by road network. The municipality has a total of 1,148 classified roads, which comprise a total of 37,710, 28,150 and 5,820 kilometres of bitumen, murrum and earth, respectively. Bitumen roads are mainly in the central business district and industrial area. Murrum roads serve the residential areas, further from the central business district, while earth roads are largely in the informal settlements. However, many bitumen roads have outlived their lifespan and require maintenance and rehabilitation (MCT, 2005). The main road in Thika town is Kenyatta Highway, which has a well maintained footpath.

The municipality has an adequate supply of water, with 200 kilometres of water pipeline and minimal water problems all year round. The municipality's water and sewerage department operates more or less like a private company—although plans are underway to privatize the provision of water and sanitation in accordance to the Local Government Act. The town uses an estimated 20 to 24 cubic metres of water per day from the storage capacity of 33,600 cubic metres. Thika draws its water from Thika and Chania rivers, which are tributaries of River Tana. Water is treated and pumped into storage tanks (reservoirs). The main reservoir, located in Chania ward, has a capacity of 16,000 cubic metres, while Mary Hill and Thika Inn have capacities of 900 and 11,000 cubic metres, respectively.

Other smaller reservoirs include, Bendor, Town centre, Kimathi 1, Kimathi 2 and Makongeni with capacities of 43, 28, 27, 24, and 15 cubic metres, respectively.

The sewer line covers 60 kilometres and serves 56 per cent of the municipality's population. The rest of the population depend on septic tanks and pit latrines (Kenya, 2002b). Lastly, Thika town is adequately served by electricity supply²; telecommunication and postal services; recreational facilities³; and educational and health institutions, both public and private.

Economic activities and employment

Thika town is an agro-industrial town. Both cash and food crops are grown in the municipality and its hinterland. In addition the town is also home to small and big industries that manufacture a wide range of products. Therefore it is imperative that the town is inhabited by wage earners in both the agricultural and industrial sectors. This labour force has created demand for various goods and services which has in turn triggered numerous economic activities both in the formal and informal sectors of the economy. These include the flourishing *boda boda* (bicycle taxi) operators and various service industries such as hotels, banks, schools and clinics.

The town is home to prominent manufacturing industries, which include the Bidco Oil Refinery Company, British America Tobacco and Kenya Vehicle Manufacturers, among others. It formally hosted the Multinational South Africa Breweries, which has since closed down. Other notable industries are engaged in textiles, bread manufacturing, oil processing, flour milling, chemical industries, pharmaceuticals, leather tanning and fruit processing. In addition, the town has a number of big hotels, which host tourists all year round. Tourist attractions include the Chania falls viewed from Blue Post Hotel and the Fourteen Falls at Kilimambogo.

The Municipal Council of Thika

The Municipal Council of Thika is run by a team of twelve elected and four nominated councillors and the technical staff headed by the Town Clerk. The mission of the council is “*to create and nurture an enabling environment for social and economic development for the citizenry of the town*” while the vision is “*to be the most focused*

provider of desired infrastructure, clean and healthy environment, and quality social services in the country”. The municipality has about 614 workers, majority of them on casual employment from time to time. The main problems faced by Thika in terms of urban management are inadequate financial resources, inadequate technical personnel, land problem and the town’s high population than what has been planned for.

Homa Bay: a lake side town in Nyanza

Geographical characteristics

Homa Bay is located in Asego Division, Homa Bay District, Nyanza Province. It is about 410 kilometres from Nairobi and 105 kilometres from Kisumu. The total area of the municipality is about 197 square kilometres, of which Lake Victoria covers about 97 square kilometres. The town therefore lies on the lake shore lowlands, with an altitude of between 1,143 to 1,220 metres above sea level. Homa Bay experiences an inland equatorial climate, moderated by altitude, wind patterns and proximity to the lake. Generally, low rainfall and high temperatures prevail most of the year. The town receives an average annual rainfall of between 250 mm and 700 mm, with two rainy seasons: the long rains from March to May and the short rains from August to November.

Historical background

The name Homa Bay was derived from the Huma Hills, which lie next to the town and protrudes into Lake Victoria in the form of a bay. The origin of the town dates back to the colonial period. It started as an administrative centre in 1925. At around the same period, the Asian community established their shops, locally known as *dukas*, hence sustaining continued trade and commercial growth. On the other hand, fishing activities and ship transport also flourished. The ship and boats docking in the town facilitated exchange of goods and products from the hinterland. Shortly before 1960 the government posted a colonial District Officer to the town and several government departments and offices were opened to facilitate local administration. Other important facilities established in the town

were the district hospital, schools and churches, leading to the continued growth of the town. In 1974, the town became an urban council; in 1987 it became a town council, before being elevated to a municipal council in 1991.

Population

The population of Homa Bay is estimated to be about 90,000, increasing from 77,000 people in 1999. Available statistics indicate that the town is growing at a rate of 2.5 per cent per annum. Attraction to the town (mainly by the surrounding rural population) is caused by the existing opportunities for employment and business operations and relatively better infrastructure and living conditions. Whereas the municipal council of Homa Bay takes into account the increasing population, it is not able to implement some of its plans due to financial constraints.

Infrastructure

Homa Bay town has one district hospital; dispensaries and clinics (mainly private); several primary and secondary schools; and, three public toilets located at Matopeni market, municipal market and at the bus park. The road network in the town is in a pathetic state, with potholes and blocked drains in most parts. Three main roads converge into the town: Rongo–Homa Bay road (which is supposedly tarmac but having pot holes all through), Kendu Bay–Homa Bay road and Mbita–Homa Bay road (which are not tarmac). Even with the lake nearby, Homa Bay suffers from frequent shortages of clean piped water.⁴ As a result, the town's other sources of water include water tanks (harvesting of rain water), water kiosk and vendors while some people are forced to fetch water directly from the lake. The sewer system is in a state of collapse due to malfunctioning of most of the components, including the treatment works.

Economic activities and employment

The main economic activities of the town are peasant farming, fishing, small and medium scale informal enterprises and tertiary services. The two markets (Matopeni

Small and medium-size towns in Kenya

and Municipal) provide an avenue for exchange of goods, especially during market days. Fishing is perhaps the most important primary activity in the town because of the four landing beaches found in the district. One industry—Capital Fish—located in the town deals with fish processing. Together with Asego Cotton Ginners, Capital Fish is important to the town dwellers by way of direct and indirect employment. However, the majority of the people are employed in the informal sector and tertiary services. To create an enabling environment for employment creation, the Municipal Council of Homa Bay does not charge the *boda boda* (bicycle taxi), boat and *mkokoteni* (handcart) operators any fees to operate within the municipality. In addition, the council intends to construct an ultra-modern carwash facility and to promote fish caging as a way of employment creation.

The Municipal Council of Homa Bay

The Municipal Council of Homa Bay is divided into six wards, each represented by a councillor. In addition, the municipality has three nominated councillors. The council has 144 permanent employees, of which less than 10 per cent are professionals. The performance and morale of the workforce is occasionally affected by the low wages they get compared to the cost of living, salary delays, too much workload and lack of housing, office space and medical care. The municipal council undertakes the following activities: refuse collection and disposal; provision and maintenance of markets, sewer network, cemetery services, bus park, municipality roads, slaughter houses, municipality schools, street lights, stadium, carwash areas and recreation parks.

Due to the town's location in the lake region, the council works closely with other local authorities in the Lake Victoria region (including those of Uganda and Tanzania). This has been successful through the Lake Victoria Region Local Authorities Cooperation (LVRLAC) whose aim is to promote sustainable use of Lake Victoria resources at the local authority level. Notably, the council is also working with the UN-Habitat on water and sanitation programmes in the municipality.

The municipality's major sources of revenue are government grants (LATF), licenses and levies while expenditures are on personnel⁵, operations and maintenance. During the 2004/2005 financial year, LATF resources represented about 40 per cent of the town's total revenue. For the last five years, LATF funded projects have focussed on repair and opening new roads, provision of water, rehabilitation of markets, street lighting, building of foot bridges, building of storm water drains and construction and rehabilitation of toilets. The council also plans to expand its water pipes to areas not connected, to start a car wash project, to open dams in the rural areas and to rehabilitate the sewer treatment plant.

With the help of UN-Habitat, the council has already developed a City Development Strategy (CDS) for the town that focuses on challenges, actions and interventions. Despite this development, the council is still confronted with problems related to urban management. These are: low revenue base; lack of a fire department; informal settlements (i.e. Sofia and Shauri Yako); unplanned structures; lack of recreational facilities for the residents; lack of a town planning department; lack of land for development; poor solid waste disposal; and poor provision of water, sewer and roads.

It is therefore yet to be seen if the municipality has lived to its vision—"A working and developing city"—and mission—"To be the best service provider by being effective and efficient in revenue collection and delivery of services".

Endnotes

1. The name was derived from the word "*kianyiri*" which in the Kikuyu language is understood to mean a place where rain falls continuously. On the other hand, Nyeri is a small hill on the western flank of Nyeri town, where rain never stops falling during the rainy season to date.
2. Except for the informal settlements.
3. Two public recreational facilities, three social halls and a stadium.
4. At the time of this research, the Municipal Council of Homa Bay was in the process of forming a water and sanitation company, in line with the Local Authority Act.
5. Wages account for about 70 per cent of the total expenditure.

Small and medium-size towns in Kenya

Vision statement at the entrance of the Thika Town Hall



At the shores of Lake Victoria in Homa Bay town

