

### 3

## Regions and Villages

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The Kenyan community, Kariua/Gacharage, or simply Gacharage, is situated in the central section of Murang'a district, about 80 km northeast of Nairobi and 20 km east of the Aberdare forest, and about 30 km from Thika. The region is characterized by long ridges and deep valleys; traditionally one clan occupied a single ridge that had been cleared by a common ancestor. With an elevation ranging from 1680 m to 1800 m and about 1500 mm of rainfall annually, the area is well-suited to coffee cultivation. Other important agricultural products include dairy, bananas, maize and beans, with the last two being the primary staples. Although technically in the coffee/tea agroecological zone (UM1 in Ministry of Agriculture parlance), tea is not grown in this part of Murang'a below about 1850m elevation. The community has exceptionally high population density for a rural area; the median household size in our sample is 6, while the median farm size is two acres.

The people are Kikuyu, the largest ethnic group in Kenya and the politically dominant group for the first fifteen years of independence. The Kikuyu are patrilineal in terms of inheritance, and have the reputation within the country of being hard-working and entrepreneurial.

This community was in the middle of the area most affected by the Mau-Mau uprising of the 1950's. Most residents older than 35 spent some time in detention camps during the government-declared emergency. Some residents sided with the government; while the sides taken during the conflict dominated politics in the region through the 1970's (Ng'ang'a 1977), by the time of our survey we did not find any continuing animosity.

In part as a response to the uprising, the colonial government instituted major changes in land policy all over the country, beginning in Central Province, including this district. These reforms were seen in part as a method of restoring order in the Province. The land reform

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involved two separate processes that were carried out simultaneously but are conceptually distinct: land registration and land consolidation. Under registration, all land was surveyed and households were given title deeds to their land. Under consolidation, a farmer's fragmented holdings were exchanged for one holding equivalent in size. This reallocating of land in the Province took place as residents left detention centers. Thus, by the end of the 1950's, most households were living on different land than at the beginning of the decade.

Policies toward coffee-growing changed at the same time as policies toward land, and for the same reasons; the colonial government wanted to develop an entrepreneurial class that would have a stake in the *status quo*. Previously, Africans had not been allowed to grow coffee in this area, ostensibly because they would have been unable to care for the trees adequately, leading to outbreaks of disease that would have spread to the European farms. Coffee spread extraordinarily rapidly in this area in the late 1950's and early 1960's, with government investment in factories and roads contributing. Households belong to one of two coffee cooperative societies, taking their coffee to one of three factories. Factories continue to open; by the time of our survey, all households in the sample were within three kilometers of a coffee factory.

As with coffee, African farmers were not allowed to keep exotic breeds of dairy cattle during most of the colonial era, and even after that restriction was lifted were not allowed to sell milk to the major market, Nairobi. These policies changed at this same time period, with the government actively supporting the growth of dairy after independence, and adding Central Province to the monopoly milk marketing agency, the KCC, in the mid-60's. Today, these two production activities -- dairy and coffee -- are the main sources of income for residents of the community.

The Tanzanian community -- Kirua Vunjo West, or simply Kirua -- is located on the southern slopes of Mt Kilimanjaro, about 25 km northeast of the town of Moshi. Arusha is about the same distance from this community as Nairobi is from Kariua/Gacharage. Trace households are spread out more than 12 km apart up the main road, from near the Moshi-Dar road all the way to the forest boundary. The village used for sampling new households is situated four to seven kilometers from the forest.

The topography is similar to the Kenyan site, but the ridges are steeper and valleys deeper. The sides of the major valleys are so steep that no cultivation can take place; between these riverine valleys and the much nearer forest, there is considerably more public land near the Tanzanian households. This turns out to be important for woodfuel, as discussed in Chapter 9. In our attempt to control for agro-ecology, it was not possible to control for both rainfall and elevation; we chose rainfall, so that average rainfall is about 1500mm. Because of the steepness in slope, there is a wider range of elevation in this community compared to Gacharage; the trace households live at elevations ranging from 1100m to over 1700m, while the households sampled for the first time in 1991 live between 1200m and 1540m. For the analysis of agricultural production functions, we limit the sample to those living between 1200m and 1540m.

Most households in Kirua farm two plots, one in the coffee zone -- normally the site of the house -- and one some 5 to 10 kilometers down the mountain at an elevation of 800 to 1100m, in which they plant maize, beans, and millet during the longest rainy season. Unlike the Kenyan farmers, few in Kirua plant maize or beans in the coffee zone. Instead, the vast majority of land in the coffee zone is planted with a combination of coffee, bananas, tubers, and trees. These are all interplanted, leading to two or three canopies. The village therefore has a much different feel than Gacharage, where coffee is planted in pure stands or (illegally) interplanted only with beans. In Kirua, much of the coffee zone feels like a dark forest or a park. In Gacharage, the land is much more open except in woodlots.

Coffee was first planted on Kilimanjaro in the early years of this century, with an exceptionally rapid expansion in the 1920's. Bananas are the staple food and the major source of income; different types of bananas are grown, some for food and some for brewing a local beer. Brewing and selling beer is a major source of income for these households. Maize, beans, and tubers are all important food crops after bananas. Population density is somewhat lower in Kilimanjaro compared to Murang'a if the lower plots are included, somewhat higher if they are not. The median household size in our Tanzanian sample is also six, but the median farm size including both zones is four acres.

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At the time of independence, Kilimanjaro region was the most highly educated of the country; Kirua had considerably higher education than Gacharage at that time. Rapid expansion of education in Kenya since that time, particularly secondary education, has reversed that relative ranking for the young in these communities.

The people in Kirua are Chagga, who are distantly related to the Kikuyu and share the patrilineal system of inheritance. They also share the Kikuyu's reputation for entrepreneurial ability and hard work. The two communities are thus similar, although not identical, in climate and culture.

### **Reference**

Ng'ang'a, D. Mukaru. 1977. "Some Aspects of Murang'a Political History: Mau Mau, Loyalists, and Politics in Murang'a 1952-1970." University of Nairobi Institute of African Studies Seminar Paper 75 (17 February) (processed).