Population Movements to the Main Urban Areas of Kenya

Movements of population though not as yet well documented in East Africa form a theme of great interest to the student of population geography in the area. In the first place, they provide essential clues to the interpretation of the current ethnic and linguistic complexities and to the early response of the population to geographical realities of the area.

But research into modern migrations is a vital background to the understanding of the problems facing the social and economic planners in the area. This paper is concerned with an aspect of population dynamics in Kenya and is based on the 1962 population census.

THE REGIONAL BACKGROUND

The modern shifts of population in Kenya have taken place and continue against the background of five main population regions (fig. 1):

1. The Lake Victoria Basin.
2. The Central Rift and associated Highlands.
3. The Plateau foreland east of the Rift highlands.
4. The Coastal Zone.
5a—The semi-arid, arid—northern Kenya.
5b—The semi-arid southern Kenya.

These are distinct population regions and their features will now be considered.

1. The Lake Victoria Basin.

From a linguistic standpoint, the region is now occupied by members of two linguistic families. The Bantu, generally found
over the higher plateau area north and south of the Nyanza Rift are members of the Niger-Congo linguistic family.\textsuperscript{1} They are represented in the area by the Baluhya and Gusii. The total number of Luhya in Kenya at the time of the 1962 census was 1,086,409.\textsuperscript{2} The Gusii (Kisii) tribe numbered 538,343. A total of 925,370 Luhya and 530,728 Gusii were reported living in the area. The rest were to be found in various parts of Kenya.

The Nilotic Luo form the second largest group. At the time of the 1962 census they numbered 1,148,335 in Kenya and of these, 1,061,621 were in the area. The rest formed part of the Kenya's total population living outside their source region. The Luo are largely found in the lower parts of the plateau to the west of the Luhya and the Gusii and in the Nyanza Rift.

The distribution of Kenya's population shows the Lake Basin as a major area of population concentration. It is part of a well defined population region which continues round the Lake into Uganda and the Republic of Tanzania.

Whereas most of the lower western parts of the plateau close to the Lake had densities of less than 200 in 1962, the greater part of the area had rural densities of 300 or more persons per square mile.\textsuperscript{3} The main population cores in Gusii district and in North Nyanza had rural densities of well over 500 persons per square mile and in a few cases over 1,000 persons per square mile.


The vast majority of the people in the Lake Basin are still dependent on a subsistence economy though progress has been made with new crops of coffee and pyrethrum in ecologically suitable areas. It should be noted that apart from cotton, the introduction of modern cash crops of coffee, pyrethrum and tea is largely post World War II.

2. The Rift and Associated Highlands.

Linguistically, the Rift and associated highlands in Kenya reflects a similar contrast. The contrast here is between the Nilo-Hamitic Masai and Kalenjin speaking peoples of the Rift floor and West Rift highlands and the Bantu groups including the Kikuyu, Embu and Meru over the eastern Rift highlands. Such was the linguistic groupings in the area at the time of the European penetration.

According to 1962 census there were a total of 1,373,976 Nilo-Hamitic peoples in Kenya and the vast majority of them were to be found in the Rift Valley Province and adjacent districts of Kericho, Narok and Kajiado.

The Kikuyu-Embu and Meru groups numbered 2,215,805 in Kenya, of which 1,802,981 were to be found mostly in the Central Province.

The distribution of population over the Rift and associated highlands focuses attention on the contrast between the east highlands of the Rift and the rest of the region.

The high densities for the Kiambu, Fort Hall, Nyeri, Embu and Meru districts over the east highlands shows a marked contrast to the rest of the region which in general is lightly populated. According to 1962 census for the five districts of Kiambu, Fort Hall, Nyeri, Embu and Meru, about 55% of the total population of the area was to be found concentrated in 46 locations with 500 or more persons per square mile.1 These locations represented 18% of the total area. This unique concentration is best illustrated by the extremely high rural densities over the district of Kiambu adjacent to Nairobi.

The extreme densities noted are in marked contrast to the rest of the floor and the remaining highland areas of the Rift.2 The better watered floor of the Rift between Nakuru and Thomson’s Falls shows higher densities. The ward average here in 1962 was between 100 and 250 persons per square mile. North and south of this part of the Rift there was a sharp fall of densities to 25 persons per square mile or less.

The highland area west of the Rift showed average density of 100-250 persons per square mile. But the low densities of the former European settled districts of Uasin Gishu with 20-50 persons per square mile should be noted.

Except for the area under forest, the Rift-region was a predominantly pastoral domain. European settlement advanced into this pastoral domain and encountered a population that had been weakened at the turn of the century by inter-tribal warfare and cattle plagues. The system of farming adopted with limited demands for labour widened the gap between the greater part of the region west and north of the Kikuyu-Embu and Meru domain and the population regions of the Lake Basin.

It will be seen later that excluding the Kikuyu, Embu and Meru area the rest of the Rift region is one of the major receiving areas of migrating population in Kenya.

From the pastoral pursuits of the Nilo-Hamitic peoples and the subsistence occupation of the Bantu groups the economy of the Rift region received a powerful impact with the establishment of European settlement. The introduced crops of coffee, wheat, tea and pyrethrum and modern methods of animal husbandry based on grade cattle have altered the economy of the area. The Kikuyu in the highlands just north of Nairobi and the Nandi and Kipsigis of the west Rift highland are among the most successful modern farmers in Kenya to-day.


The plateau foreland extends from the eastern limits of the Rift highlands of Kenya and slopes gradually eastwards to the Indian Ocean.

From the population point of view, this is in the main, an empty area except for the higher residuals such as Machakos and Kitui hills and the hills of Taita. These residuals trap the moisture and in general receive 30 inches or more a year. Reliability analysis show better prospects than for the vast plains surrounding the residuals.

The Machakos residual in 1962 indicated densities of 500-750 per square mile in the better watered parts north of Machakos. An average of 100-250 persons per square mile was recorded for the higher parts of Kitui district and Taita Hills.

Between these residuals and the populated parts of the coast is a vast country with an average density of less than 5 persons per square mile.

1. Ibid.
4. The Coastal Belt.

The population of Kenya's Coastal belt is largely concentrated in that part of the coastal plain south of Tana River delta.

An average density of between 100-250 was recorded for most locations of the coastal plain. On the immediate neighbourhood of Mombasa higher densities were recorded. In the interior poorer farming prospects are reflected in the sparse population of the coastal hills. Here densities were generally 50 persons per square mile or less. The coastal belt merges westwards into the relatively empty scrub land of the interior.

5 a-b. Semi-arid, northern and southern Kenya.

This population region may be regarded as a continuation of the relatively empty plateau foreland between the Rift highlands and the coast. The region is thinly covered by a nomadic and pastoral population largely Hamitic in origin in the north and the Nilo-Hamitic Masai in the south.

Over this vast surface of a generally low-lying, hot semi-desert with occasional rocky massifs, the 1962 census gave an average figure of under 10 persons per square mile. Economically, the northern area is largely dependent on the trade in sheep, goats and camels. In the south, the pastoral Masai subsist on cattle and small stock.

Types of Migrations in Kenya

The total population of Kenya is affected by two main types of movements, the international and the internal streams. If the seasonal migrations across the borders with Ethiopia, Somalia and Tanzania in search of pasture are excluded the international stream of movement is largely directed to Uganda and the Republic of Tanzania.

In 1959 Uganda's census recorded 37,648 Luo (0.6% of Uganda's tribes) and in addition 43,255 other Kenya tribes. Available statistics do not permit a breakdown of all the tribal groups involved. But it is clear from the numbers that Uganda is an important goal for Kenya migrations. Movement into Uganda is primarily to the economically more developed parts of the Lake Basin including the Eastern province.

The Tanganyika census of 1957 listed the following comparative figures of immigrant tribes in the country from Kenya.¹

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tribe</th>
<th>1948</th>
<th>1957</th>
<th>Percentage Increase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teita</td>
<td>8,658</td>
<td>3,395</td>
<td>— 60.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamba</td>
<td>2,348</td>
<td>10,865</td>
<td>+ 362.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luhya</td>
<td>2,611</td>
<td>1,634</td>
<td>— 37.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kikuyu</td>
<td>3,918</td>
<td>856</td>
<td>— 78.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sabaot</td>
<td>621</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>— 100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Luo who form an important proportion of Kenya migrants were excluded in the 1957 census definition of immigrant tribes which restricted the term to tribes without recognised tribal areas in neighbouring Tanzania.

International migrations are but a component of much larger volume of population shifts within the country either between the rural and urban areas or between rural areas.

This paper is largely concerned with the stream of migrations directed to the City of Nairobi and to Mombasa District. The statistical material is from the 1962 census of birth places and a 10% Sample Census of age and sex distribution of the African population.

THE NAIROBI STREAM

According to birth place statistics² for the City of Nairobi a total of 130,628 out of 156,246 Africans were born outside the City. This figure represented 83.60 % of the City's total African population and excluded figures for Peri-Urban area. For Nairobi's Extra-Provincial District the figures were 79.01% of the total African population.

The flow diagram for Nairobi (fig. 2) shows important regional differences. If distance is taken into consideration, by far the most important stream of population was from Nyanza Province. This represented a total of 46,093 or 35.24% of the total volume of migrants into the City. The largest volume of population movements is naturally from the nearby Central Province which contributed 58,668 or 43.20% of the total. The third most important source of the City's population was the Southern Province which accounted for 21,817 or 16.70% of the total.

But provincial figures concealed important district contrasts. The majority of Nyanza migrants came from the districts of North (15.56% of the City’s total) and Central Nyanza (15.33%). South Nyanza contributed 1.84%, Elgon Nyanza 1.01% and Kisii District 0.53%. The rest were recorded as Nyanza Province.

Of the Central Province stream Fort Hall contributed 20.00% of the City’s total, Nyeri 10.20%, Kiambu 9.00%, Embu 3.00%, Meru 0.70%, Nanyuki and Thika 0.10% each.

The Southern Province which contributed 16.70% of the City’s population showed the dominance of the two Kamba districts of Machakos and Kitui. The most closely settled district of Machakos contributed 16,746 or 12.82% and Kitui 4,734 or 3.62% of the City’s total African population. The remaining Masai districts of Kajiado and Narok were insignificant in their total contribution.

The least contribution on a provincial basis came from the sparsely peopled Northern Province. The Coast and the Rift Valley provinces contributed about equal proportions (Coast: 1.48%, Rift Valley: 1.10%).

Thus in the development of the City of Nairobi the effect on the rural population has been greatest in the two most heavily populated regions of Kenya, the Lake Basin and the highland area east of the Rift in the districts of Fort Hall, Nyeri, Kiambu and Embu.

The Mombasa Stream

The role of Mombasa as the premier port on the coast of East Africa is reflected in its expanding industries and employment opportunities. As the next largest town in Kenya it exercises a regional pull second only to that of Nairobi. But Mombasa shows a striking contrast in the proportion of migrants to total African population. The persons born outside Mombasa district in 1962 numbered 57,654 out of a total African population of 111,847. This represented 48.67% of the total population of the district (fig. 3).

Provincial figures showed the dominance of coastal sources. These contributed (20,737), or 35.97% of the total population born outside the district. A detailed breakdown by districts showed Kilifi-Malindi in the lead with 14.90% followed by Taita district with 11.24% and Kwale 6.55%. The smallest contributions came from Lamu (1.23%) and Tana River (0.91%). These two districts lie in drier and sparsely peopled section of the province and are hampered by poor communications.

Nyanza Province numerically represented the second most important source of Mombasa’s shifting population. But in terms of distance
and the pull of the port this is clearly the most important of the streams.

In 1962 population of Nyanza origin accounted for 14,390 persons (24.96%) of the total migrant population of 57,654 in Mombasa district. Majority of Nyanza’s population were drawn from Central Nyanza. This source contributed 8,982 persons or 15.58% of the total population of the district. The next most important source was North Nyanza with 3,207 or 5.56% of the total population. The other Nyanza districts were relatively unimportant as sources of Mombasa’s migrating population.

The Central region including Nairobi and the Central Province accounted for 7,874 or 13.66% of the total population of these Embu district contributed about 5.00%, Fort Hall 1.98%, Kiambu 2.22%. Other sources emerged as relatively unimportant.

Southern Province contributed 13,968 or 24.23% of the total populations. This figure was largely contributed by Kitui district 9,368 (16.25%) and Machakos 4,168 (7.23%) of the total population involved.

The Northern region with 0.37% and the Rift Valley Province with 0.81% were the least important sources.

**Nakuru Area**

Although available statistics do not permit the separation of figure for Nakuru Township from those of the district as a whole the influence of this highland township clearly emerges from the figures for the Rift Valley Province.

Out of a total of 263,393 persons born outside the Rift Valley, 115,673 were recorded in Nakuru district. This figure represented a total of 43.9% for the whole of the Rift Valley and was far out of proportion to the other farming districts of Laikipia, Naivasha, Trans-Nzoia and Uasin Gishu.

It is suggested that the majority of the migrants in Nakuru area were most probably in the township.

**Selective Nature of Migrations**

The flow diagram though important in giving a picture of the overall stream and direction of internal migrations is of limited application. It is not possible from the figures to study the selective effects of population shifts on the different ethnic elements which form the population of Kenya.
MOVEMENT OF AFRICAN POPULATION
1962 CENSUS
MOMBASA DISTRICT (57,654)
(Origins of total population)
The 1962 10% Sample Census of age and sex pattern\(^1\) provides a vital material for qualitative study of the movements and their national effect. In using the population pyramids allowance must be made for possible errors arising from faulty age statement and from smallness of sample. The samples used may have been influenced by an overstatement of ages of girls of adolescent age. It is also possible the young men may have understated their ages to evade liability to taxation.

**African Population Pyramids of the City of Nairobi**

The age sex pyramid correctly interpreted embodies the experience of a group over a considerable span of time.\(^2\) In an attempt to examine the implications of the African population age and sex structure the time factor in the rapid growth of Nairobi need not be over-emphasised. Nairobi’s history though confined to a little more than half a century could be considered in a number stages.

From its establishment as a railway town during the first decades of the present century Nairobi has had an African element in its population. The railway industry which accounted for a major part of its regularly employed labour force must be regarded as contributing to the early establishment of migration to the growing urban centre.

But the next real stimulus to movement into Nairobi must be regarded as post World War II. The war had the effect of stimulating demand for employment among the rural population. Rural Africans moved into Nairobi in search of military and other forms of employment. The influx created during the war years resulted in tremendous pressure for accommodation. By 1941 it was reported that about 6,000 Africans had nowhere to sleep in Nairobi. The end of the war intensified the problem of the rural influx into Nairobi.

Apart from implications of the economic development to the migrating population the recent period of emergency must be considered in the interpretation of the population age and sex structure.

The African age-sex pyramid of the City shows the African groups as essentially a youthful population dominated by the inflow of people between the ages of 15 and 45 (fig. 4a). There is a large base of child population followed by a relatively small proportion of people between the ages of 5 and 15.

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A closer analysis shows significant sex differences in the total population. Whereas the migrating male population tended to bunch between the ages 15 to 45, the female population appears to be more important between the ages of 15 and 34. There appeared to be a sharp drop in proportion of women beyond the ages of 34.

From the ethnic point of view Nairobi is dependent on its labour force largely on the up country tribes from the main population centres of Kenya (fig. 1). The Kikuyu, Embu and Meru group from the nearby Central Province, the Luo, Luhya and Kisii groups from the Lake Basin form the predominant groups of the stream of population moving into the city.

But in addition to the main sources of the population the strength of the City’s pull is reflected in the presence of the smaller Coastal groups represented by Mijikenda (fig. 4b) and the Rift Valley members of Kipsigis and Nandi tribes. Nairobi is further one of the few selected goals of Taita migration (fig. 4b). Taita Hills is a population centre with severely restricted space but a relatively high density. But whereas the age-sex distribution of the important ethnic groups show the typical migrant pattern, there are a number of subtle divergences which call for comment.

The Kikuyu pyramid (fig. 4b) is striking for a population which lives so close to the city. We have already noted the importance of the Fort Hall and Nyeri stream. But it is also probable that the inflow of Kikuyu into the city of Nairobi in post-emergency and pre-independence years has had some influence in the pattern shown. The related Meru and Embu tribes (fig. 4b and 4c) may also have been affected.

All the Central Province migrants showed a concentration between the ages of 15-45 for men and 15-35 for women. In some cases the upper age limit was as low as 29 years (Mbere, fig. 4c). The migration among the Nandi appear to have affected the female population far more than the males (fig. 4c). Proportionally the females were more significant between the ages of 35 and 60 than the men. The sharp drop among Kikuyu women was not a feature of the Nandi population.

Among the Nandi males, population was concentrated between ages 20-30. The Kipsigis of the Rift Valley differed from the Nandi in the relative proportion of the males in the population (fig. 4c). Most of the Kipsigis males were between the ages of 20 and 35. The distribution of women was rather different. There appeared to be a slower drop in the proportion of the women within the five years groups between the ages of 19 and 50. This may be the result of the practice of employing female domestic servants. The ages 19 to 34 and 40-55 stand out among the Nandi population of Nairobi.
The Kamba population showed (fig. 4d) a concentration of the male population between the ages of 20 and 45, but a rapid drop in the proportion of older people above 50 years when compared with the Kikuyu population.

There is a similar sharp decline in the percentage of women in the female population above the age of 30. At 30 to 34 the Kamba women in the age group formed about 6% of the total female population. The proportion among the Kikuyu for the same age group was 8%.

For the Lake Basin sources the concentration of population between the ages of 15 and 40 was even more marked. The Gusii population showed a concentration of men between the ages of 15 and 29. The ethnic group showed a very small proportion of the age group 40 to over 85 (fig. 4d).

The Gusii though from one of the principal population regions are among the smallest contributors to the shifting population in Kenya. The Luo and the Baluhya who dominate the Nyanza stream of migration broadly show a very similar pattern (fig. 4d). There is a concentration in each case of the male population between the ages of 19 and 45 with the largest proportion between the ages 25 to 29.

The female population is in both cases younger and is concentrated between the ages 19 to 35. There is a striking absence of women in the older age groups particularly the ages 40 onwards. In both cases there is proportionally a large child base between the ages of 0 to 9.

For the peri-urban area of Nairobi, there was a much more gradual fall of the proportion of the male in the age groups from 20 to 50 among the Kikuyu and Kamba. But for the other migrants, there was a marked bunching between the ages 20 and 30.

The Luhya male population showed a preference by the age group 35-39 and the Luo 25-29. For the female population the Luo and Luhya groups showed concentration between the ages 19 to 29.

![Fig. 4a. -- Nairobi City: Total population, 1962.](image-url)
Fig. 4b. — Nairobi City: populations, 1962.
FIG. 4c. - Nairobi City: populations, 1962.
Fig. 4d. — Nairobi City: populations, 1962.
The age sex pyramids for Mombasa District shows three significant differences. The first major difference is between the migrating population from up country and the ethnic elements from the coast. The pyramids for the total population (fig. 5a) is largely dominated by the age sex distribution of the main migrating group represented by Kikuyu, Embu, Meru, Luhya, Luo, Kamba, Gusii and Taita (fig. 5a-b-c).
Fig. 5b. — Mombasa District: populations, 1962.
FIG. 5c. — Mombasa District: populations, 1962.
Fig. 5d. — Mombasa District: populations, 1962.
This is a population largely dominated by the age ranges of 15 to about 40, for the males and 15 to 35 for the females. Most males tend as in Nairobi to concentrate in the age group 25-29, and the females were largely between the ages of 20 to 24.

But even among the up country migrating population there are significant contrasts. The Kikuyu population shows a larger proportion of children. Among the Nandi (fig. 5c) the proportion of women in the age groups above 35 is far higher than in most groups. The Mbere group included with the Kikuyu-Embu and Meru, is largely a male community with very few children and women limited to the ages of 15-30 (fig. 5c).

The pattern for the coast group tends to show the effect of distance. The Pokomo-Riverine group has an age sex pyramid which closely approximates to the pattern of up country populations (fig. 5d).

The Swahili-Shirazi, a long established coastal population, shows a rather more stable pattern with more people between the ages 40 to 60 (fig. 5d). Even among the Bajun element the influence of inward migration is not so apparent (fig. 5d).

But the important stream of coastal Bantu tribes grouped as Mijikenda is clearly reflected in the age structure. Unlike the up-country groups, there are rather more children in the population sample (fig. 5d).

Conclusion

It has been established that internal migrations of population is one of the most important features of Kenya's present economic development. Evidence presented draws attention to pressure of population on land as a factor in the movement of peoples.

But the direction and volume of migration is largely influenced by the pattern of investment in the natural resources of Kenya. The regional pull away from the rural area to the urban centres may be regarded as results of the last half a century of colonial economic policy. It has been facilitated by improved transport and communication.1

The dominant contribution of Nyanza, Central, parts of Southern and the Coast provinces are in the main the outcome of socio-economic causes arising from the impact of economic policies in the rural areas.

But it is not merely in its regional impact that internal movement of population should attract the attention of the social and economic planners. In qualitative terms, the migrations mainly affect the youthful part of the population men in their productive years.

Kenya's African population in the urban areas is largely composed of people between the years of 20 and 45 with a very small proportion between the ages 5-15. It is possible that this age group forms an important proportion of the rural population and hence constitutes a burden to those left on the land. The age sex pyramids for the source districts indicated an average of 10-20% of the population in each sex group for the years 5-15.

Although the bulk of the country's population remains rural the absence of the important age groups from the source regions has serious implications to rural developments.

The question posed is whether economic and social planning should intensify this exodus to existing traditional goals or whether a more balanced policy of rural investment should be encouraged to reduce the pressure of work seekers over the present urban centres.