

# An Historical Trajectory of the Economic Transformation of the Southern Keiyo Community in Kenya

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## ABSTRACT

The paper examines economic opportunities and differentiation among the agro-pastoral households in Southern Keiyo in three ecological zones (the highland, escarpment and the valley). The basic assertion of study is that socio-economic processes in these areas are the product of inter-relationships of history, environment and culture. The goal of the people across the three zones is better living standards. At the community level, this will be reflected in roads, schools, hospitals and at the household level, in entrepreneurial activities, salaried employment and in the education of their children. Diversification of economic activities is the most common strategy employed in pursuing development. Apart from growing of crops and keeping animals for consumption and sale, the people also engage in off-farm activities, for example working for wages, running retail shops and performing casual labour. A theoretical construct has been employed to analyze and interpret the interaction that occurred between the environment, colonial and post colonial states on the one hand, and the response of agro-pastoral households in Southern Keiyo on the other. This is Talbot's principal themes of innovation, diversification, adaptation and commercialization. The main argument is that diversification reduces risk and uncertainty, and thus can be the most rational economic path to choose. But the ability to diversify is neither equal among people of the same ecological zone, nor is it comparable across ecological zones because of social differentiation. History and environment have combined to create a much more favourable economic opportunity structure in the highlands. Unlike the rocky escarpment, the highlands receive more rainfall and have more moderate temperatures than the hot and dry Kerio valley. Therefore, the highlands are especially well suited for production of crops and livestock. The British colonial administration recognized these differences in agricultural potential and this affected their policies. Consequently, the highlands became the focus of most colonial development efforts, pattern that continued after independence both through government policy and the initiative of some people trying to achieve development. Although a few people on the escarpment and in the valley are able to progress, people in the highlands generally enjoy the most secure life. It is therefore, argued that contemporary socio-economic processes can neither be explained by a single variable, nor in synchronic perspective; instead they result from a dynamic combination of historical, environmental and cultural variables.

**Keywords:** Keiyo, Trajectory, Transformation, Economic, Eco-Zones

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The paper examined agro-pastoral households in Southern Keiyo, who inhabit three very different ecological zones. It demonstrated that these people engage in a variety of economic activities in order to reduce ambiguity and also achieve their own and their national goal of development (Kettel and David, 1976).

The agro-pastoral households actively seek to diversify their income-generating activities both as a means of insurance and as an investment strategy. These strategies are fully compatible (Berry, 1980). In fact, “for many environments and technology sets, what seems like risk management strategies and practices are also the most profitable alternatives over time” (Walker and Jodha, 1986).

Generally, agro-pastoral households own relatively small amounts of land and rely mainly upon family labour to produce crops that meet most of their consumption needs and also produce a small surplus for sale (Barker, 1989). However, many households depend as well on critical off-farm sources of income, such as wages from members who are employed locally or in other parts of the country, and it is this latter income that leads to differentiation between them. Most households aspire to a better life for themselves and their children. However, in reality, the majority of them have not attained or realized this ideal. The resource access and control is differentially distributed in Southern Keiyo (Chang’ach, 2016a). This differential access to and control of resources is manifested not just at the individual and household levels, but also at the level of the eco-zone. The resources that are available to individuals and households within the same area and between areas are not of the same quantity and quality.

A few individuals and households within each of the three zones are more favourably endowed in terms of access to and control of productive resources such as land, livestock, money, shops, vehicles, education and alliance with the state among others. They are also the persons who are best able to broaden their economic activities and are considered in the Keiyo community as models of development worthy of admiration and emulation (Chang’ach, 2016b).

On the other hand, there is also a wide disparity in the distribution of resources across the three eco-zones. The highlands are more conducive to agriculture and animal husbandry for several reasons. First, in any given year, more rain falls in the highlands than on the escarpment or in the valley. The likelihood of fluctuation in timing and amount of rainfall is also less in the highlands than in the other two eco-zones. Second, in addition to the lesser amount of rainfall in respect to the other eco-zones, apart from the Kerioriver itself, sources of surface water are scarce. Rivers which originate in the highlands and cut across or run down the escarpment face are concentrated in the northern end of the valley. The higher temperatures in the valley preclude the growing of some cash crops like pyrethrum, although others such as cotton, maize and beans grow extremely well if the limiting factor of water is overcome (Chang’ach, 2015).

Furthermore, the highland areas are conducive to larger scale mechanized agricultural operations. This is not possible on the rocky slopes of the escarpment or in the valley. Finally, livestock production of improved breeds is constrained in the valley due to the presence of disease vectors, like the tsetse fly and the absence of suitable amounts of water and pasturage. These factors inhibit the keeping of quality grade dairy cattle and encourage the continued reliance on trypanosome resistant breeds like East African goats, red Maasai sheep and indigenous zebu cattle.

## 2. LOCATION AND RELIEF OF THE KEIYO AREA

Keiyo South sub-county is one of the sub-counties in Elgeyo-Marakwet county in former Rift Valley province. It is bordered by Keiyo North sub-county to the north, UasinGishu county to the west, Baringo county to the east. Keiyo South sub-county is situated between latitude 0°20’ and 1°30’ north and longitudes 35°0’ and 35°45’ (Chebet

and Dietz, 2000). The Kerio River flowing north of Lake Turkana forms the natural boundary with Baringo district. The sub-county covers an area of 1,456 square kilometres (Chang'ach, 2015).

The sub-county is divided into five administrative divisions: Tambach, Kamariny, Chepkorio, Soy and Metkei. This study is confined to the southern part of Keiyo that is Chepkorio, Soy and Metkei divisions. The divisions have been divided into locations and sub-locations, covering an area of 998 square kilometers (Chang'ach, 2015).

This area is suitable for such an exploration because it is characterized by a great variation in vegetation cover that results from topographic differences covering the highland, Elgeyo escarpment and the Kerio valley floor (Chebet and Dietz, 2000).

Southern Keiyo is divided into three physical regions that run parallel to each other in a north-south direction. These are from west to east: the highland plateau, the Elgeyo escarpment and the Kerio valley. The highland plateau rises gradually from an altitude of 2,700 metres on the Metkei ridges in the south to the north culminating in the Cherangany mountains which reach the height of 3,350 metres at the northern boundary. Thereafter it terminates at Kerio valley that averages 1,000 metres above sea level. The Kerio valley is narrow, averaging 6.4 kilometres in width and runs some 150 kilometres from the Kabitoi in the north to Metkei in the south (Chebet and Dietz, 2000).

Rainfall varies with altitude between 1,000 millimetres to 1,500 millimetres in the highlands to about 500 millimetres in the lowlands. The rainy season ranges from March to September with the peak rains in May and the driest period between December and March. The vegetation in the Kerio valley is mainly acacia trees and shrubs with very poor ground cover. The escarpment is covered by dense tropical forest, while the highland plateau is mainly made up of bamboo forest (Chang'ach, 2016b). These physical features have a bearing on the district's development potential. Areas of higher altitudes have higher rainfall and higher potential for agriculture. This is evidenced by the economic activities undertaken and the population concentration in such areas.

### **3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The complementarity of the agricultural and pastoral sectors were put into serious doubt under colonial capitalism. The colonial state as the economic censor board was an uneven arbiter. It discriminated against the pastoralists and devoted more attention to crop production. While the colonial state had all along appropriated livestock products it was not until the Swynnerton Plan of 1954 (Swynnerton, 1954) that official action was taken to improve agriculture and animal husbandry. After independence, the government has attempted to come to grips with the socio-economic realities of pastoralists. However, change in the pastoral areas has been quite gradual, leaving crop production to occupy the centre stage in Kenya's national economy. This paper seeks to address economic differentiation by focusing on changing economic opportunities among the agro-pastoral households in Southern Keiyo.

### **4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The main problem is to determine the causes of differential development within and across the three ecological zones in southern Keiyo. Specifically, the study attempts to answer the following question: What is the role of ecology in determining economic opportunity and inequality? What is the impact of colonial and post colonial Kenya's socio-economic policies on economic differentiation? How did the Keiyo agro-pastoral households respond to these circumstances in the period of study?

## 5. JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

Various works on economic transformation carried out in Africa, at regional and even national levels tend to be too general, given their broad scope. This study will assume that economic transformation is regionally specific and its analysis requires local studies for a better comparative analysis. It will therefore narrow down the unit of focus to the Keiyo community inhabiting southern Keiyo district. The research findings will be of great use to economic planners and policy makers especially in relation to economic development. Besides, the study will serve as an important reference point for researchers and general readers interested in how Kenya, in particular the Keiyo, evolved to their present form. The study also provides additional background information to the field of African economic history.

Furthermore, it has emerged from the review of literature that the information related to the history of economic activities of the Keiyo is inadequate. Hence an inquiry into the history of the economic transformation of the Keiyo is a relevant undertaking in the sense that it will create an understanding of the history of the Keiyo as a whole. A study of this nature that focuses on agro-pastoral households may in the long run shed some light on the agents of change in the area. This study, therefore, hopes to make an important contribution to the growing literature on Kenyan economic history.

### 5.1. Review of Related Literature

This section reviews studies undertaken that contribute to an understanding of the changing economic opportunities and differentiation among the agro-pastoral households in Southern Keiyo. These works are reviewed from a thematic approach to help point out issues related to this study, to illuminate issues that need further research and to discover gaps that have not been handled by previous works. Therefore, this study seeks to find out what assisted or hindered the Keiyo responses to opportunity and circumstances. A study of economic differentiation among agro-pastoral households in Kenya ought to be pivoted around sub-themes such as environment (ecology and geography), peasant households, the colonial and post-colonial periods and the market. These sub-themes have generated a rich literature whose review is systematized below.

### 5.2. The Environment in terms of Opportunities and Constraints

Siddle David and Swindell Kenneth have propounded that African farmers are adept at using a diverse range of ecological niches for food staples, to which have been added the demands of export crops (Siddle and Swindell, 1990). Furthermore, land use systems are not mutually exclusive and any one household may embrace several methods of production and land-use. Indigenous systems are built on the cornerstone of a sophisticated knowledge of the local environment in terms of opportunities and constraints. They argue that the knowledge of the “foraging” opportunities is a primary requirement for most rural settlements in Africa. To this must be added the knowledge of the rainfall and temperature regimes, the quality of seasonal variation in farming opportunities and the capacities of each of the said types and conditions of slope. This work provides a valuable background and insights in understanding of the ecology as a determining factor in the changing economic opportunities and differentiation among the agro-pastoral households of southern Keiyo.

Similar to Siddle and Swindell, Phillips John has focused on the question of ecological sustainability in relation to human economic development. According to him, due to the risk of agricultural activities and related development programmes being accelerated beyond a tempo in keeping with the solution of Africa’s human, and other biotic and physical problems, it is imperative to plan ecologically in terms of cause and effect, action and reaction, stimulus and response. He continues to argue that this will aid in laying the foundation of an ecological

approach to the study of Africa's agricultural and related development (Phillips, 1959). It is clear from this work, that the one and only sound foundation to agricultural and related development is an ecological one, constituted by knowledge of the climatic, vegetational and soil features of a specific locality. Throughout this study, an effort will be made to argue that the advantages of an ecological ground-plan for the investigation and the development of the agricultural and associated resources of Africa, south of the Sahara are necessary (Phillips, 1959). Whether success has been achieved, only time and experience will reveal. This study attempts to precisely fill the gap with the available information on the importance of ecology in distribution of resources.

Like the preceding analyses, Peter Little's focus is also important on ecological processes that have shaped Ilchamus society (Little, 1992). He argues that the ecology of Baringo, characterized by well-watered highlands, lush swamps and barren lowlands, have played a significant role in the history of the region. The different ecological zones provided both opportunities and constraints to populations who migrated to the areas. Land use potential in Baringo, defined largely by the availability and reliability of rainfall tend to be closely associated with environmental gradients. Differences in rainfall divide the region's 10,700 square kilometres into three general agro-eco-zones based on rainfall agricultural potentials. His observations provide a useful guide to the present study, and his conclusions can be compared with the southern Keiyo, an area with similar eco-zones.

Kjekshu's study on communities in Tanzania further underscores the inter-connection between ecology and human economic activity. He asserts that pastoralists and agriculturalists understand their ecological environments quite well, and that their activities are determined by ecological conditions. This is a fact that Kjekshus demonstrates quite well in Tanzania's case (Kjekshus, 1977). His work demonstrates how the pastoralists in Tanzania are very well versed with the ecological balance of their regions and how their movements are a positive response to the physical and social environmental challenges. The work of Kjekshus thus, provides useful information to the present study, which likewise seeks to assert that the Keiyo understand their ecological environment quite well, and their activities are rationally determined by ecological conditions.

The influence of ecological factors over farming systems is also recognized by Upton who argues that agricultural growth and development depend upon the decisions about the management of the farm, which are closely linked with household decision on what to eat or how to allocate time between work and other activities. The typical unit of production is the family comprising of a man, a wife or wives and their unmarried children, although other relatives may be involved (Upton, 1996). Despite the ability of agro-pastoralists to modify the natural environment, choice of farming system, crop and livestock enterprise and methods of production are constrained by the climate and soils of the region (Upton, 1996). He goes ahead to argue that within broader climatic regions, local variations in topography and soil influence the choice of farming system and therefore divisions into the main agro-ecological zones. The natural vegetation, for example the forest and grassland have prevalent types of weeds, diseases such as trypanosomiasis that limit the choice of crop and livestock enterprises and the method of production.

In the same vein, Ogot argues that African ecology viewed from a historical perspective should deal with the story of man's effort to adapt himself to his environment and his environment to himself (Ogot, 1979). It entails a discussion of the climatic, vegetation, geological and other natural factors which have shaped the course of developments, and of how much the human beings ability and willingness to change things have led to their present regional, economic and cultural differences in Africa. Ecological studies should, therefore, stimulate historians to explore the fields of geography, economics, biology and ecology (Ogot, 1979). In ecological studies, it is necessary to study spatial dynamics and cultural landscape. Ogot suggested that ecological history must be focused on man, the historian actor, and his awareness of alternatives of action in both time and place (Ogot, 1979). How did

individuals in a past society perceive their place in the temporal and spatial sense? And having perceived their place, why did they make the choice they made? Ogot's work is valuable to this study. It is therefore clear from all these studies that the ecology exercises a strong imprint on the activities and choices that agro-pastoral households make. These works provide valuable information to this study.

In Southern Keiyo, for example, the three main eco-zones are the highland, escarpment and the valley floor. Historically, the Keiyo used to have interests in all the zones. Each clan had a strip of land running from the highlands up to the Kerio River (*Endo*), on the valley floor. The sharp geographical division of the land resulted in two distinct sections: the lower part being the valley which is part of the Kerio valley basin, and is characterized by harsh climatic conditions of a typical semi-arid land. This narrow strip of land is punctuated, at short intervals, with hills and pockets of small valleys which leave very little room for cultivation. Rainfall is erratic, resulting in frequent droughts which are a threat not only to crops, but it has a devastating effect on livestock. The rich clay and loam soil in most parts of the valley could have turned the area into a productive agricultural land had rainfall been adequate and stable. The highland is generally regarded as excellent agricultural land both for cultivation and the keeping of livestock. These physical features have a bearing on the development potential of the area.

### 5.3. The Colonial Period in Keiyo

There is no doubt that colonialism played a central role in drastically restructuring long established patterns of agricultural production and trade in order to re-orient the African rural sector towards the imperatives of the market (Makana, 2005). Since the incorporation and subordination of African peasants was effected by economic and political means, the colonial state was the single most important institution in actualizing this goal (Makana, 2005). A lot of work has been produced on colonial capitalism in Kenya of which a few examples are by Berman (1990b); Leys (1975); Kitching (1980); Swainson (1980); Langdon (1975) and Brett (1979). Fearn (1961) on the other hand uses modernization theory to explain the same. All these works are useful to this study as the authors have tackled the subject from the view of dependence and articulation of modes of production theories. They observe that settler dominance, virtually excluded development among the Africans. Colonialism led to a net transfer of resources from the African to the European sector. It also required that the African sector be reduced to an underdeveloped labour reservoir for the European sector. Consequently, African agriculture suffered from lack of adequate labour to such an extent that it could not develop at par with settler agriculture. Apart from labour expropriation, other policies of the colonial state that marginalized African peasants included, land alienation, taxation, the *kipande*(pass) system, squatterdom, and the institution of the chief among others. This observation is true and it gives a clear picture of what happened in southern Keiyo under colonialism, so that present economic inequality in southern Keiyo can be partly traced to the colonial period. Their observation provides a useful guide to the present study, and their conclusions, though acceptable at national level, have been tested against the background of a lower and small unit of study, such as in the case of southern Keiyo.

Bowles (1976) in his work spells out a framework along which further study can be undertaken. He delved into the underdevelopment of agriculture in colonial Kenya, by highlighting some ecological and dietary aspects. Bowles suggests that environmental limitations determine production and hence shortages. That in explaining poverty, it is necessary to include both environment and conditions of colonial production. Bowle's work will give important insights to the present study in examining the historical determinants of economic opportunity and inequality.

Chang'ach (2011) analyzed the organization and transformation of an agro-pastoral economy among the Southern Keiyo in the colonial period. He demonstrated that the dynamism and innovativeness of the Keiyo

indigenous agro-pastoral economy showed its efficiency and productivity. His work provides valuable reflections in the direction of the present study.

Berman and Lonsdale (1979) have analyzed the colonial state as an agent of economic change through its efforts to spur the penetration of capitalist forms of production and exchange. The self-interest of the colonial state in this process was partly in response to the imperial insistence for financial self-sufficiency in each colony. However, the extent to which this objective could be achieved was also dependent on the disposition and resolve of local administrators in specific regions in Kenya (Maxon, 1992a). Thus, overall, these authors are quick to point out that the colonial state's freedom of action in this process was often constrained and determined by local factors within the colony (Berman, 1990a). The colonial state was continually compelled to re-define its role in Kenya's political economy in response to the many crises that bedeviled the colony's economic substructure. The concept of the relative autonomy of the state is of significance to this study, because it provides a framework for discerning not only the rationale behind state action, but also the extent to which state policies could be enforced without eliciting resistance or undermining overall efforts at economic transformation.

This study emphasizes how colonial state initiatives and policies not only impacted, but were themselves in turn impacted upon by African agricultural production. The Keiyo had a role to play in the behaviour of the colonial state. That is why the colonial state could only enjoy relative autonomy.

#### 5.4. Peasant Households in African Context

Robert Maxon defines peasants as households that have relatively stable access to cultivable land and that utilize family labour (Maxon, 1992b). Such peasants produce commodities sufficient for their subsistence and reproduction and they produce a surplus which could be sold in internal and external markets. He argues that peasantization brought in its wake differentiation. Increased commodity production for internal and external markets engendered an increase in wealth to some households. The process of differentiation was also fostered by the penetration and spread of western education. Wolf defines peasants as; rural cultivators whose surpluses were transferred to a dominant group of rulers that uses the surplus both to underwrite its own standards and distribute the remainder to groups in society that do not farm but must be fed for their specific goods and services in turn (Wolff, 1974). Judith Heyer argues that peasants have classically been defined in two different and yet complementary ways. First, peasants are part-societies, defined by their subordinate relations to external markets, the state and the dominant culture. Secondly, they use their own labour, and that of their families and their own land and tools, to provide for their own subsistence. "Peasant economy" is a self-sufficient mode of production. Peasants can only provide for themselves by both consuming their own produce and selling and buying commodities and services. Furthermore, peasant households usually both hire and sell labour-power to supplement family labour, seasonally and as it changes over the life cycle of peasant households, and also family incomes. Access to land and other sources of income is unequally distributed amongst peasants (Heyer, 1981). These studies resonate quite well with this study which likewise attempted to interrogate the variables determining changing economic opportunities and differentiation such as ecology, state policies, the market and education, among other factors.

Aseka (1989) has analyzed the Buluyia economic and political systems in the pre-colonial and colonial periods, using the historical and dialectical materialist approach. He identified various contradictions between the imperialist colonial state in Kenya on one hand and the unprecedented upsurge of the nationalist struggle in the colony on the other. He examined the issues of land alienation, labour expropriation, taxation, commodity production, trade and exchange in Buluyialand and showed how the Buluyia indigenous farmers entrenched themselves into commodity

production and some were even turned into a waged labour force in the interests of colonial capitalism. Through agriculture, wage labour, squatterdom and education, Aseka provided a detailed study of various social formations, forces of production and the process of accumulation of wealth by an embryonic African middle class, resulting in social differentiation and formation of a wealthy and wage labour force elements in the populace. His work will provide valuable reflections to this study.

In his article, [Atieno – Odhiambo \(1974\)](#) traces the African indigenous farmers from a rich and prosperous independent farmer with surplus food to exchange, to one impoverished and relegated to the economic backwaters of the colonial system. He contends that both the enhancement of the African farmer and the expropriation of his labour were basically a colonial creation for the benefits of the settler economy. In his view, the logic of capitalist exploitation upset the rural economic equilibrium and therefore created both peasantization and proletarianization. His analysis of the colonial transformation of agriculture in Africa is a useful guide in the examination of economic transformation of the post 1960 developments in Keiyo.

GoranHyden's concept of the economy of affection denotes a network of support, communications and interaction among structurally defined groups connected by blood, kin community or other affinities like religion. It links together in a systematic fashion, a variety of discrete economic and social units, which tend to be informal rather than regular and formalized. According to Hyden, these are invisible organizations, which constitute both opportunities and constraints for efforts to change African societies ([Hyden, 1985](#)). The face-to-face nature of the exchange in the economy breeds a certain trust and sense of mutual obligation that makes the bulk of Africans inclined to give priority arrangements of an informal rather than a formal kind. These may involve the exchange of cash from a relative or friend; gifts of goods and services such as labour and child care. These kinds of exchanges perform an extremely important function in the society that formal institutions cannot match. He further argues that the economy of affection may capture parts of developmental activities like the purchase of farms, promotion of small businesses, informal loan arrangements, and use of kin to supervise investment projects. The advantage of the economy of affection is that it diversifies surpluses generated by the formal economy for use by categories of people who do not have access to formal structures. This study views the economic differentiation among the Keiyo agro-pastoral households within this framework.

This study therefore, faultsHyden's cultural barrier hypothesis and present unambiguous evidence of positive peasant response to economic incentives. His insights are valuable in interpreting peasant behaviour against a background of increased state incentives to draw into commodity production as occurred in Kenya during the depression, the Second World War. Hyden fails to take stock of the fact that peasants can have intermittent engagements and disengagements with both the state and capital purely as a coping mechanism.

### **5.5. The Impact of the Market on the Keiyo Community**

Literature abounds focusing upon the effects of market forces on Africa's peasant households. The works by [Orvis \(1970\)](#); [Maxon \(1992b\)](#) and [Berry \(1993\)](#) stress the intrinsic ability of peasant households to take advantage of opportunities presented by the internal market. Focusing on the Gusii community of western Kenya, Orvis presents an analysis of how rural response to market forces engenders household structures that reflect embryonic processes of social differentiation and class formation. Depending on access to market opportunities and off-farm income, Orvis argues that peasant households get increasingly differentiated into straddler, peasant worker and pure peasant categories ([Maxon, 1992a](#)).

The thrust of this argument is also reflected in Maxon's comparative study of Gusii and Vihiga, which contends that market opportunity is a key variable in providing impetus for rural households to develop farming in ways that enhance incomes and contribute to national development (Maxon, 1992b). Like Orvis, Berry's analysis also recognizes that access to off-farm earnings, and the ability to mobilize substantial hired labour resources are key factors in determining patterns of socio-economic stratification in Africa. With specific focus on West Africa, Berry maintains that the spread of commercial agriculture during and after the colonial period created a considerable scope for capital accumulation in rural trade and industry as well as in cash crop farming (Berry, 1993). The importance of these works therefore lies in their capacity to provide valuable insights about agro-pastoral household's responses to market opportunity. However, it should be noted that, existing works have not exhaustively analyzed the impact of commercialization on household division of labour as well as on the appropriation of the resultant surplus. Yet, these are variables which are critical in occasioning economic differentiation and class formation. Through a study of the Keiyo, the research seeks to bridge this lacuna.

### 5.6. The Post-Colonial Period in Keiyo

Agriculture is the backbone of the Kenyan economy, as it is for most African countries. Kenya's smallholder farmers produce approximately 75 per cent of the country's total agricultural output. In spite of these facts, Kenya's post-independence agricultural policies have clearly been unfavourable to the development of smallholder agriculture. State policy still favours large-scale farms at the expense of small-scale farms.

The work by Bates (1989) makes an important contribution in highlighting the role of state action and state institutions in influencing the development of rural economies. According to Bates, institutions refer to lineages or the kinship system, political parties, parastatal bodies, electoral systems and cooperatives (Bates, 1984). By pointing out the political underpinnings of governmental economic intervention through an emphasis on institutions, Bates analysis is of direct significance to this study. Which likewise, seeks to investigate changing opportunities and differentiation in the face of increased bureaucratic intervention in the market.

The contention that "institutions and those in control of them help to determine who are the winners and who are the losers in economic life" (Bates, 1989) is of particular relevance in interpreting the outcome of the encounter between the Keiyo agro-pastoralists and an internal market, increasingly regulated by the institutions and policies established by the post-colonial state.

Susan Chebet and Ton Dietz, have argued for a case in which the Elgeyo-Marakwet escarpment cliff and the government of Kenya have acted as a development cultural divide (Chebet and Dietz, 2000). They have compared the people who had remained down the Kerio valley with people who had "climbed the cliff" to the highlands with the assistance of the government. They have concluded that the household economic profiles for the highland, the escarpment and the valley zones of Keiyo shows that differences exist. Climbing the cliff was a way to improve one's living standard. In the highlands, around Chepkorio, the off-farm opportunities both in terms of paid jobs and business were much better. For those on the escarpment and lower valley around Simit and Muskut respectively, these authors argued that the area as a whole was the poorest, in terms of income, acreage per farmer and livestock wealth and opportunities (Chebet and Dietz, 2000). They thus conclude that the prevailing conditions indicate that both the valley and the highlands have comparable economic potentials in income if the people can use the opportunity. However, they did not examine the causes of the changing economic opportunities and differentiation in Keiyo, which this study aims at unearthing. Despite this shortcoming however, their work certainly provides useful reflections to this study.

The Keiyo have produced some of the most politically seasoned and exposed elites who were prepared to take on the challenges of the changing political and economic circumstances of the time (Chebet and Dietz, 2000). The interface between state power and economic

development that is the political economy of the Keiyo in the post-colonial era, which this study undertakes will help gauge the argument projected by Bates that state institutions and those in control of such institutions determine who are the winners and losers in economic life (Bates, 1989). In spite of the useful information contained in many of the above cited works, it is evident that none of the authors has focused on the changing economic opportunities and differentiation among the agro-pastoral households in southern Keiyo. Thus, the study is an attempt to correct this omission and help bridge a major gap in Kenyan historiography by bringing the Keiyo into the mainstream history of Kenya in particular and Africa more generally.

### 5.7. Talbott's Framework

Change is the essence of every human society and one of the primary objects of historical inquiry. Throughout history, human beings have been interacting with their environment and transforming it in order to satisfy their material needs. Human beings have always struggled to design appropriate techniques and technologies for adapting to the surrounding environment. This study employed Talbott's concepts of innovation, adaptation, commercialization and diversification. The framework will give a comprehensive understanding of the determinants of economic opportunity and inequality in southern Keiyo. The study of determinants of economic opportunity and inequality in southern Keiyo will also be undertaken within the framework of Talbott's theory of commercialization, innovation, adaptation and diversification which he used in studying African agriculture in Kenya (Talbott, 1992). The concept of innovation as used in this study refers to the people's ability to develop new systems and techniques in production and exchanges. These include new farming styles, new crops, new tools and new exchange modes amongst a host of other aspects. Adaptation refers to the development of new consciousness which in effect originates new and suitable alternatives consonant with the situational experiences. Diversification refers to the systematic and well-seasoned pattern of introduction and adoption of new crops, animals, crafts and trade items within a people's production culture. Commercialization on the other hand refers to an economic expansion aimed at generating a surplus for the market. Therefore, the application of situation logic and opportunity structure and Talbott's framework helps in explaining the economic differentiation among the agro-pastoral households in Southern Keiyo.

## 6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data collection centred on Southern Keiyo administrative divisions of Chepkorio, Soy and Metkei. These three regions were selected for the reason that they cover the three ecological zones. The study adopted an integrative approach in interpreting secondary data in the context of the focus and scope of the inquiry. Examination of the data involved content analysis of secondary data to try and establish facts, trends and linkages along the main themes handled by the study.

## 7. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Like peasant farmers in other parts of the developing world (Ortiz, 1973) small-holder farmers in Africa are faced with multiple sources of risk as they attempt to make a living from uncertain social, political and natural environments (Barker, 1989). In this paper it is demonstrated that the Keiyo adapted to risk and uncertainty through diversification of economic activities (Hangerud, 1988). Put simply, through "multiple livelihoods" or

“multiple incomes” strategies, the Keiyo tried to do whatever was necessary to make ends meet (Halperin, 1992). However, they did so not only to reduce risk and uncertainty but also in the hope of “getting ahead” – succeeding financially and achieving the laudable and desirable goal of development (Kettel and David, 1976). Thus, through economic diversification, the people of Southern Keiyo, like other Kenyans, strove to better themselves and by extension, their country (Thomas, 1985).

Yet, as in most of Kenya, the ability to diversify economic activities was not uniform households and across ecological zones. A minority of individuals in each of the three ecological zones were relatively well endowed with economic resources due to their own favourable situational logics – their position in the local power and wealth based on their access to and control of resources (Chang’ach, 2016a).

On the whole, however, the highland ecological zone presented the people who lived there with the most favourable distribution of resources, or economic opportunity structure (Kettel and David, 1976). This was the result of a combination of ecological and historical factors that had interacted to produce the contemporary patterns of opportunity and inequality in southern Keiyo.

The highlands of southern Keiyo had always been the most favourably situated of the three ecological zones with respect to natural productive potential. Ample and predictable rainfall ensured both good crop production and abundant pasturage for livestock. However, prior to the *Pax Britannica*, the Keiyo were unable to exploit this area due to the presence and military superiority of the UasinGishuMaasai (Chang’ach, 2011). Following the demise of the UasinGishuMaasai toward the end of the nineteenth century, the Keiyo were able to take advantage of the highlands for a brief period of time. Unfortunately, this newfound prosperity was short-lived as white settlers soon moved on to the UasinGishu plateau and carved out huge farms for themselves. The Keiyo were once again forcibly confined to the Western half of the Kerio River Valley in the Elgeyo Reserve, an area of relatively limited agricultural potential and low carrying capacity for humans and livestock.

As part of a larger process of partial incorporation into the colonial economy (Wolff, 1974) many Keiyo went to work on settler farms or on the Uganda Railway from the 1920s through 1940s (Chang’ach, 2011). Those who worked on settler farms were exposed to new agricultural ideas and land-use techniques. Later, from the late 1940s through the 1950s, these ideas and techniques spread rapidly with the colonial government’s effort to implement land tenure reform and promote improved agricultural practices (Huxley, 1961). Some Keiyo were fortunate enough to be resettled in the highlands settlement schemes of the 1950s and early 1960s. Others could afford to buy highlands land outright following the exodus of white settlers following independence in 1963. These persons were able to benefit from the new agricultural ideas and land-use techniques promoted by the British Colonial administration as well as from the decades of greater investment in the infrastructure of the highlands vis-a-vis that in the valley and on the escarpment. Those who were less fortunate had to remain in the valley or on the escarpment. Although they adopted some of the new agricultural ideas and land-use techniques, the ability to capitalize on them was as limited by natural factors in the environment as it is today: Lack of adequate predictable rainfall in the valley and the hilly, rocky, and sloping nature of the terrain on the escarpment (Chang’ach, 2016b). The years since independence have by and large brought continuity in these trends, as the residents of the highlands have experienced more of the fruits of development (better housing and living conditions, higher incomes from both on-and off-farm sources, and better access to medical facilities) than their counterparts in the valley and on the escarpment.

Information gathered through field research in the three ecological zones support these contentions. Demographic characteristics demonstrate that the population of the highland was generally younger, better educated and had a higher percentage of persons engaged in salaried employment than the populations of either the

escarpment or the valley. Information on household characteristics also shows the highlands to be the most favoured of the three areas; for example households there were larger and contained a higher percentage of extended families than elsewhere. The distribution of important non human resources (land, livestock, water and material goods) also shows that households in the highlands were the most favoured of the three ecological zones (Chang'ach, 2015).

The livelihood strategies that people employed and the economic activities in which they were engaged were both similar and different in the three ecological zones of southern Keiyo. Although the strategy of people in all three areas was to diversify economic activities, not everyone was able to do so. While there were a few individuals in the valley and on the escarpment who were able to successfully diversify in order to "get ahead," the vast majority of the inhabitants in these two ecological zones were extremely limited in their ability to succeed economically. Average household income in the highlands, both from separate sources such as crop or milk sales or wage labour and from all sources combined, was substantially higher than that of households on the escarpment and in the valley (Chang'ach, 2016a). In fact, so much more benevolent was the economic opportunity structure of the highlands that it appeared as though some households reached a threshold of economic security, a level beyond which they no longer sought to diversify their economic activities. The same situation does not occur as frequently (if at all) in the valley or on the escarpment.

Finally, the information on time allocation demonstrates that generally, the people of southern Keiyo worked hard to make a living. On average, however, the people of the highlands engaged in a higher percentage of productive activities than those in the valley or on the escarpment. This reflected the fact that the highlands were more tightly integrated into the modern Kenyan economy than the other two ecological zones.

Moreover, in all three ecological zones of Southern Keiyo, it was women who engaged in the highest percentage of productive activities. Children also devoted a substantial if underestimated amount of their time to the daily running of the household. They were therefore, still viewed primarily as an economic asset rather than as a liability even though education was a major source of expenditure for parents. Men as well contributed to on-farm work effort, though they were more likely to be engaged in wage labour than the members of any other age and sex category. Off-farm income greatly augmented the economic security of the household since it freed people from total economic reliance upon local environmental factors, like rainfall.

The findings of this paper are similar to many of those from studies performed in the neighbouring Counties of Nandi (Oboler, 1985) and Baringo (Kettel and David, 1976) although focusing primarily on women, Oboler notes that:

The particular forms of present-day Nandi culture and society resulted from a unique conjunction of historical processes such as colonialism and world capitalism and certain pre-existing social, cultural, economic, and ecological conditions... certain forces that existed in the colonial situation and for the most part have continued into the post colonial setting have frequently eroded women's traditional economic rights and sources of power and influence (Oboler, 1985).

In Southern Keiyo the "erosion" of economic opportunity has affected both males and females, and it has also occurred within and across communities and ecological zones. The same process had happened in Baringo District. Kettel and Kettel had demonstrated how the lowland Tugen of North Baringo had contributed more resources towards national and regional developments than they had received in the form of benefits. The prosperous few in

the lowlands had access to government jobs (Kettel and David, 1976). The few who were fortunate enough to get early access to education and business opportunities had prospered largely at the expense of their neighbours.

These processes had also occurred in Southern Keiyo. The lowlands population, those who live on the valley floor, are still waiting for the basic services that have been present in the highlands for decades. These include schools, hospitals, good infrastructure, hospitals and dispensaries. Although a few households in the valley and still more on the escarpment had been able to “get ahead”, on the whole, people in the highlands were much more economically secure and prosperous than their counterparts at lower elevations.

In this paper, it has been argued that while there is some ecological foundation for these very different regional opportunity structures, their creation is equally accounted for by the historical factor deriving originally from the British colonial period and perpetuated through the post independence era. It is suggested that future development efforts in this area should shift resource distribution entirely from the highlands to the escarpment and the valley. Nonetheless, if equity is to be a consideration then more concerted efforts should be made to redress those past imbalances in the distribution of resources in the hope of improving the productivity of the land in the Kerio valley and enhancing the living standards of its people.

At this point it is prudent to examine the relevance of a micro-study on the livelihood strategies and economic activities of Keiyo smallholder farmers. Agriculture is the backbone of the Kenyan economy, as it is for most African nations. Kenya’s smallholder farmers produce approximately 75 per cent of the country’s total agricultural output (Peterson, 1986). In spite of these facts, Kenya’s post independence agricultural policies have clearly been unfavourable to the development of smallholder agriculture (Peterson, 1986). Although there is an inverse correlation between farm size and output per hectare and despite notable successes in smallholder agricultural development, state policy still favours large scale farms at the expense of small-scale farms (Hangerud, 1988).

The reality of agricultural policy in most of sub-saharan Africa is that it reflects the combined interests of the urban and rural elite, as well as the perceived need to placate the potentially volatile mass of urban consumers with subsidized low prices for food staples such as maize meal (Bates, 1989). These factors have led to long-term, systematic policy discrimination against African smallholder farmers. However, many observers believe that County and national governments must now become more attentive to the needs of smallholder farmers. Jonathan Barker discusses some of these reasons:

Some argue that peasant farmers simply have to convert to industrial wage work or capitalist farming by the slow but inevitable turn of the wheel of history. As a type of production they will be crushed, but the smarter and luckier will survive. The trouble with this perspective is that the economic prospects for Africa do not include a rapid and broad based industrialization for many years. Nor will irrigation and a green revolution bring rapid rural transformation even on the inadequate scale experienced by Asia (Barker, 1989).

In an effort to understand these types of socio-economic systems, Netting has suggested that there are very clear reasons why the smallholder farming mode of agricultural production and the various social formations that accompany it persist across time and space.

Smallholders are not as rich as landed aristocrats, the higher officialdom of government, the commercial elite, or urban professionals... what they do have in their experience, their fertile land, their livestock, and their diversified production strategies is a set of defenses against the uncontrollable vagaries of weather, prices and war. Smallholders may also not always live well, but they

are seasoned survivors. They may moonlight as craftsmen, petty traders, field hands, or factory workers, but they do not keep one foot on the farm out of sentiment or stupidity. And the society that dispossess smallholders in favour of factory farms, plantations, or socialistic communes simultaneously risks a decline in agricultural production, rural unemployment, and ecological deterioration (Netting, 1989).

It is imperative, therefore, to understand the mechanisms of smallholder farming systems. Smallholder farmers like the Keiyo are not subsistence cultivators; they are integrated into a larger social, political, and economic context and have wants and needs that cannot be satisfied in a subsistence economy (Saul and Woods, 1987) Saul argues that:

Those whose ultimate security and subsistence lies in their having certain rights in land and in the labour of family members on the land, but who are involved, through rights and obligations, in a wider system which includes the participation of non-peasants (Saul and Woods, 1987).

But contemporary African smallholder farmers are not simply a vast, homogenous mass"... much as potatoes in a sack (Marx, 1987). Peasants are not all alike "there can be among peasants different peasantries—differentiated according to their structural position at any specified moment of time (Saul and Woods, 1987).

In this study it is suggested that diversification of economic activities, both in order to reduce risk and create better economic activities is a common strategy of smallholder farmers. Netting notes that,

Among smallholders households members will generally pursue a variety of full- and part-time occupations...Though the household may not be a full-time agrarian unit, the pooling of income from many sources, periodic co-operation to perform farm tasks and the protection against risks that comes from a diversified economic base increase the resilience of the smallholder enterprise (Netting, 1989).

One consequence of this strategy, however, is often the exacerbation of existing inequalities or the creation of new ones (Little, 1985). Opportunities that become available to successful peasants often result from some combination of wage labour, salaried employment and entrepreneurial activities. Furthermore, successful smallholder farmers usually re-invest in various entrepreneurial opportunities rather than in improved farming. As Barker notes,

Rather than enlarging the farm, a successful peasant farmer will buy a small track and enter the business of carrying crops to the market. He or she may also become a purchasing agent for the crop and a retailer of consumption goods and farming inputs. It is easier to achieve wealth in trade and transport than in farming... the fact remains that the road to greater wealth and power in the market place passes from farming to trade, transport, and what might be called political accumulation, much more often than it passes through investment in bigger and better farming (Barker, 1989).

Perhaps nowhere in Africa has this scenario of free enterprise, market economies based on the entrepreneurial spirit been more prevalent than in Kenya. Until recently, Kenya's agricultural and general economic performance was lauded as one of post independence Africa's few real success stories (Bates, 1989). The capitalist path chosen by Kenya's government was seen to be largely responsible. For example, Lofchie's comparison of the capitalist

economic policies of its neighbour Tanzania attributes the relative success of Kenyan economy to the government's economic policies (Lofchie, 1988).

However, through 1980s and 1990s Kenya experienced a "crisis of capitalism (Hetherington, 1993). The country's population had grown rapidly, while the arable land base remained relatively fixed at about 18 per cent of the total landmass. The non-farm economic sector was not able to absorb the large numbers of secondary school leavers and university graduates that the country's educational system continued to produce each year (Johnston, 1989). In addition, a debt crisis occurred in Kenya and across Africa as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and various Western donor countries pressed African governments to implement Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) as a prerequisite for continued economic aid. SAPs required, among other measures, currency devaluation, freezing of government salaries, an end to agricultural price setting and the elimination of price subsidies for urban consumers (Lofchie, 1988). The then Kenyan President, Daniel Arap Moi, rejected these structures, claiming that they would bring undue hardships upon the *wananchi* (citizens). In reality, though, the economic crisis that faced Kenya was a result of unfair lending policies by the International Monetary Fund, World Bank and other International donors; it was also at least partially attributable to "a cult of corruption...which rewards crookedness at the expense of merit" (Harden, 1990). Diana Hunt made a convincing case for widespread land reform in Kenya, observing that:

If Kenya cannot provide adequate income opportunities for the majority of her rapidly growing labour force, her present economic crisis will become transformed into a major human and political crisis. The aim must be to create sufficient employment opportunities while also providing a sound basis for sustained long term growth. There is no easy solution to this problem. Indeed... the only potentially viable solution is to radically re-distribute land. Agriculture is the foundation of the Kenyan economy. The structure of this sector has a profound influence on employment and growth not only in agriculture itself, but throughout the whole economy. Agriculture alone can sustain the Kenya economy and polity during this period of explosive population growth. However, it can only do this if the structure of land ownership is dramatically altered. If a land reform is implemented within the coming decade adequate income opportunities for at least the current generation of labour force entrants can be provided (Hunt, 1984).

By the 1990s no such reforms had occurred. However, there had been a number of changes. Under internal and external pressure, Kenya, like a growing number of other African countries, adopted multiparty political system in December 1992. However, the interests of the elite continued to be served at the expense of the masses. Rather than implementing land reform and increasing capital flows to rural areas, members of the Kenyan government protected their privileged economic and political positions. Therefore, in Kenya, agriculture is shaped by intra-national inequalities which favour a small group of elite farmers who help formulate policies that perpetuate inequality within the country.

Like other rural Kenyans, the Keiyo, were firmly committed to economic development at the national, regional, and local levels. By seeking to diversify their portfolio of economic activities, they had tried to better themselves and also their country. On the related and ever-present subjects of drought, famine, and food security in Africa, diversification heightens security. However, the ability of the people to diversify and, therefore achieve the elusive goals of economic security and development varies among individuals, households, and ecological zones in southern

Keiyo. To a large extent, this predicament mirrors the situation in the country as a whole: the extant patterns of economic opportunity and inequality have been created, and are reproduced, by a combination of ecological, historical and socio-cultural processes. The future political and economic paths that the people and the government of Kenya choose will determine whether these patterns of economic differentiation persist or whether smallholder farmers, *the wananchi*, are politically and economically empowered for the first time in their lives. The fact that these men and women are responsible for the bulk of the country's agricultural production would seem to be a major incentive for Kenyans to prefer the latter course of action.

## 8. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study are important and may equally apply to other areas which have complementarity between livestock and crop economies. More importantly, it is a challenge to historians to undertake research in such hitherto neglected studies so that they may illuminate the dynamics of rural economies. The findings from such studies can help economic planners to devise appropriate and practical policies which can ensure the political and economic empowerment of smallholder farmers.

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