

# URBANIZATION

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## ABSTRACT

*Because of the presence of Mombasa, Coast Province is the second urbanized region of Kenya, after Nairobi. Urbanization in this part of the country goes back more than 1,000 years and was reflected in the numerous trading centres along the coast line. After their arrival, the British colonizers partly continued and partly redirected the urbanization process by making some of the existing towns into administrative centres. Restrictive policies regarding the movement of the African population, however, prevented a fast growth of the towns. This changed dramatically after independence, leading to the present situation which is mainly characterized by the primacy of Mombasa. At the other extreme, each district has a number of small centres, mainly with local administrative and commercial functions.*

## INTRODUCTION

The Coastal Region of Kenya forms an important urbanised region which is isolated from the rest of Kenya. The area contains about 10% of the total national population and 18% of the total urban population of the country. This paper surveys the urban population background, placing emphasis on urban demographic realities. It also gives a history of urbanization of the region through space and time and of the changes in the socio-economic development which have taken place since independence. Such a regional approach has become more significant and central to spatial planning in recent years following a shift from national to local level planning.

The phrases urban centre and urbanization arouse different definitions from various cadres of people. The criteria of delineating an urban centre from a rural area are diverse and, therefore, defining an urban centre is more of an academic exercise. Various countries have adopted different definitions based on political, demographic, social or cultural considerations. Scholars have also come up with their definitions. While the definition of an urban centre is country-specific, the definition of urbanization has been generalized to accommodate the international understanding of the process. Urbanization is the process

of migrating from the rural to urban areas and engaging in non-agricultural activities. Urbanization is also defined as a process of acquiring non-rural behaviours. The census definition of urban centre adopted by the Government of Kenya is based on the above definition in addition to having a minimum population of 2,000 inhabitants. This definition has always been used and is considered to be realistic by international standards.

#### PRE-COLONIAL URBANIZATION

Urbanization in the coastal region is mainly a product of Arab and British colonization. Despite the fact that the area had a long history of contact with the countries of the Middle East, India and China, modern urbanization was superimposed on the area's cultural landscape (Obudho 1983; 1985; 1992a; 1992b). According to Hull (1976: xiii), a pre-colonial or 'traditional' African urban centre is "a collaborative body of inhabitants under the jurisdiction of an elite with political, economic, or religious authority (...) [such a town must be seen] as centre, not only of population, but of religion, the arts, governance, the military, industry or commerce." Taylor (1978: 44-45) regards the pre-colonial urban centre in East Africa as an "invisible urban centre", which he defines as "a location where many of the functions of a town are carried out but where there are fewer, if any, permanent structures associated with these functions than observers, used to a western concept of towns might expect." These definitions are appropriate; urban centres in the area must be defined on the basis of the economic, political and socio-cultural functions they perform. Based on these definitions, several urban centres existed in the Kenya Coast during the pre-colonial era.<sup>1</sup>

#### *The pre-Islamic era*

The earliest mentioned urban centres in the region are contained in three books. The first one, the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, was composed as a guide to the ports in the Indian Ocean, in the first or second century AD (Huntingford 1976). The second one was Ptolemy's *Geographia* from around 150 AD (Stevenson 1932). Like its predecessor, it concentrated on the spatial identification of landmarks and the sailing time between various urban centres. The third book was that by the Arab geographer Al Masudi who travelled down the region in 914 AD and commented that the Kambalu (probably Pemba or Zanzibar) built their capital with a rich kingdom around it.

These early centres had emporia (a fixed commercial organization with regular customs dues) and their own rulers (Strandes 1961: 14). The emporia included several places in the present Lamu archipelago, such as Faza, Lamu, Pate and Manda. They were the main exchange centres for the maritime trade with the hinterland. For centuries this trade between the Arabian countries and the East African coast continued to prosper without permanent Arab settlement (Freeman-Grenville 1962: 14-17).

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1. The terms 'urban centre', 'centre' and 'town' are used interchangeably.

*Early Muslim urban centres: 1000-1500 AD*

Because of the oral nature of the history of urbanization of the area, the division between the pre-Muslim and Muslim period is not clearly marked. Arabs arrived at the coast in the middle of the eighth century and they were joined later by other newcomers from Arabia, Persia and India. Their ideas about trade and urban life were generally welcomed by the local people. The urban centres they established were Muslim in religion. But this does not mean that the centres were completely Arab and Indian in culture. They were African because Islamism was localized and nationalized just as it was done in pre-colonial centres in other parts of Africa. Arab geographers writing at this time stressed that, although there were a number of Muslim trading posts and settlements along the coast, the maritime trade continued to be of greater importance than the settlements.

The town of Manda, in the Lamu archipelago, was founded in the ninth century and at that time it was an urban centre of remarkable wealth covering twenty hectares with a population of over 5,000. The buildings were of mud, wattle and coral stone. Manda had a higher proportion of imported goods than any other coastal town during this time because of the extensive coastal trade with the centres of Mombasa, Malindi, Pemba and Kilwa to the south. The importance of Manda began to decline when the merchants from Mogadishu were able to gain control of the southern trade in the thirteenth century.

The earliest known historical reference to the urban centre of Lamu is preserved in an Arabic manuscript which describes a meeting between the fifteenth century Arab historian Al-Magrizi and the judge of Lamu in Mecca in the year 1441 AD. The *Lamu Chronicle* describes Lamu as consisting of two independent centres, Hidabu to the south of present Lamu and Weyumi to the north. They existed from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century. Present Lamu was incorporated towards the end of the fifteenth century.

The next important emporium in this period was Malindi, which is one of the oldest urban centres (Martin 1973). By the time the Portuguese arrived in 1498, it was a thriving commercial town with many mosques and important buildings. The inhabitants of Malindi welcomed the Portuguese whom they hoped to use against their rival, Mombasa. When the Portuguese finally succeeded in defeating Mombasa in 1589, their need for Malindi diminished. Malindi continued to decline until the latter part of the nineteenth century when it was re-established as a fishing village.

Gedi (Quelman), one of the earliest and best preserved pre-colonial settlements, was founded towards the end of the twelfth century in the forests which are adjacent to the present village of Gedi (De Mello 1964). About 45 acres of land were covered with stone buildings including a large palace, several mosques and private houses. The inhabitants imported trinkets from Persia and India, Arabic pottery and Ming ware from China. After about three centuries of prosperity, Gedi was peacefully evacuated by its inhabitants.

Halfway between Gedi and Mombasa were the centres of Mtwapa and Kilifi (the latter comprising of Kilifi itself, Kioni-Mnara and Kitoka), both of which were founded in the early part of the fourteenth century. Other minor centres that existed between Kilifi and Mtwapa included Takaungu (Huntingford 1963: 201-3).

Another important urban centre at this time was Mombasa. The earliest known references to Mombasa are from the geographer Al-Idrisi in his *Kitabu Rujar*, who visited the

place in the twelfth century, and from another geographer, Ibn Battuta, who visited it between 1329 and 1331. During the succeeding centuries a number of Swahili communities known as *Mataifa* were established in Mombasa such that by the beginning of the seventeenth century, Mombasa was a confederation of twelve *Mataifa* organized into two groups: the nine (*Tisa Taifa*) and the three (*Thelatha Taifa*) (Berg 1968: 35-36; de Blij 1968).

By the fifteenth century all the centres on the coast were Muslim and the majority of the inhabitants spoke Kiswahili. The most important urban centres were Mombasa, Malindi, Lamu and Manda (Chittick 1965: 125-37). Some, like Gedi, Pate, Malindi and Lamu, were prosperous markets whose importance spread far into the interior. Each centre was ruled by an independent Sultan and most of them did not try to influence the inhabitants of their respective hinterlands.

The urbanization of the coastal region after 1200 was linked with migrations from Arabia and the Persian Gulf. Despite the fact that the majority of the urban dwellers were Africans from the mainland, all centres were governed by the Shirazi Arabs, most of whom were related by ties of blood or marriage. Nevertheless, there were frequent struggles between the towns. The most powerful and outstanding centres were Mogadishu in the thirteenth century, followed by others such as Pate and Mombasa before they were captured by the Portuguese. The ruling Arabs established a symbiotic alliance between the urban dwellers and Africans such that the Arab rulers provided military protection for the Africans in exchange for their support in case of a dispute between one centre and another.

Urban planning as we know today did not exist. Nevertheless, there was some form of planning so as to maintain the spatial and temporal social order of the time. With the mosque as the central focus, the rest of the centres was nothing more than an agglomeration of the buildings with the narrow streets occupying the remaining space. Apart from the Sultan's house, there were no public buildings at all that could be identified as part of the urban culture. Even the elaborate stone-built houses were vastly outnumbered by the mud and wattle houses in which the majority of the population lived. Because of the close association of these urban centres generally, the layout of the houses were almost identical (Chittick 1965: 114).

#### *The Portuguese period: 1500-1700*

When the Portuguese arrived at the East African coast, they had three purposes in mind, namely (i) to take by force the portable wealth they could find in the urban centres, (ii) force the local rulers into paying taxes to the agents of the King of Portugal, and (iii) bring the trade of the Indian Ocean under their control. They partially succeeded in the first two objectives but not entirely in the last one because the towns had become steadily more powerful and important in the fifteenth century, thus offering substantial resistance to the Portuguese attempt to colonize the area. The Portuguese colonization was a prelude to the development of modern urbanization in the region.

The urbanization of the coastal region went through two important stages: first, the intervention of the Portuguese and Omani Arabs and, secondly, the migration of Africans

from the interior to the centres. Because of the superior power of the Portuguese invaders, they captured all the coastal towns, with the purpose not only to secure and guarantee them as supply bases for sailing vessels but also to destroy the Moslem faith and replace it with Christianity. The towns were administered from their base in Mozambique.

The coast entered a period of urban decline and disaster during the Portuguese occupation. Centres that resisted the Portuguese were attacked and were looted and burned. Towns that were not attacked suffered in other ways which proved equally destructive to their wealth and livelihood. Instead of ships getting a Portuguese passport in order to trade in the Indian Ocean, many ships stayed home. This brought about a decline of commerce and, therefore, of wealth, too.

The first outside threat to the Portuguese domination came from the Omani Arabs who challenged their position in Mogadishu, Brava, Kismayu, Faza, Pate, Lamu and Kilifi between 1585 and 1587. During that period all towns but Malindi rose in arms against the Portuguese. The Arab invasion efforts were aided by the Zimba, Galla and Segeju who were warlike ethnic groups roaming the coastal region and attacking centres across the region. Despite the fact that the Portuguese retained control, their position was thus weakened that when the Dutch and English showed interest in the coastal towns, these newcomers did not face strong opposition.

During the Portuguese period, people from ethnic groups like the Mijikenda started to migrate to the urban areas and allied themselves with the Omani Arabs. Trade was carried on with these interior groups, most of whom obtained the trading goods from further inland. This was the beginning of the long-distance trade between the coast and the East African interior. The goods of these trading expeditions were exchanged in the form of barter. Items traded were those sought for export, for trade with the mainland, and for use in the coastal towns. The Portuguese traded mainly in gold, ivory, frankincense and *myrrh*, mangrove poles and iron. A few slaves were also exported but this was not a popular trade because human beings were comparatively expensive to transport.

#### *The Omani Arab period: 1700-1895*

The coastal towns continued to offer regular resistance to their rulers and the Portuguese chronicles of the period are replete with accounts of one rebellion after another. In general, uprising swept all the centres such that by 1700 the Portuguese influence was completely eliminated north of Cape Delgado, except for a brief interlude in 1728-9 when they re-occupied Mombasa. Expulsion of the Portuguese did not automatically mean the establishment of Omani rule in their place, however. The centres valued their own individual independence and were not ready to surrender to any foreign power. It took a century before the Omani could establish themselves in the various towns.

The history of coastal urbanization from 1750 to 1850 can be regarded as a struggle between two Omani dynasties, the Mombasa-based Mazrui and the Muscat-based Busaidi. The first people to rule the coastal towns were the Mazrui Arabs who came to Mombasa at the end of seventeenth century. They succeeded in strengthening their power both locally and further afield. They made peace between the two rival Swahili groups of Mombasa, the *Thalatha Taifa* and the *Tisa Taifa* both of whom acknowledged the Mazrui

as rulers of Mombasa. The Mazrui also made commercial contact with the Wanyika, something that would later transform the urbanization process in the area through the latter's migrating to and settling in the coastal towns.

In 1785, the Busaidi settled in the centres, thus absorbing the Mazrui Arabs who had since long intermarried with the Waswahili and other coastal Africans. But in Mombasa the Mazrui rulers were exiled to Takaungu in 1837. This centre developed into a major trading centre following the fall of Mombasa to the Omani Arabs. The Mijikenda trade followed the Mazrui north. Takaungu's outlying trading settlements at Mtsanganyiko and Konjora were soon exporting twice as much grain as Takaungu. Malindi and Mambrui were also developed as plantation settlements by the new Omani rulers. Vanga, Wasini and Pongwe continued to provide an outlet for the neighbouring Digo, Segeju and Duruma while Lamu continued to exploit its own mainland farms and conducted some trade with Pokomo, Oromo and Kamba. Using the quarrels and rivalries among the coastal towns, the Omani Arabs gained complete control by 1837.

This was the first time that an attempt was made to organize and reorient the coastal urban centres from maritime to hinterland trade. The basis for the expansion of the caravan trade was caused by the demand for raw materials in Europe and the expanding demand of the coastal plantations for slave labour. It was a radical break with the past and it marked a new departure in the relationship between the coast and its hinterland (Berg 1968: 48). The initial impetus for the caravan trade came from the coastal ethnic groups such as the Mijikenda and in-migrated Kamba, though it were the Arab caravan traders who really reinforced the coastal and inland trade (Taylor 1978: 148). The caravan trade, which started as early as 1825, was further stimulated by the involvement of other ethnic groups. This not only increased the trade itself but it also speeded up the tempo of the building of the caravan trade centres between the coast and the interior of Kenya (Obudho 1983).

By the end of the precolonial era, there was a four-level hierarchy of centres based on the types of functions as well as the size of the hinterland (Taylor 1978: 14). The lowest order served a local community and the majority of the participants were drawn from within a day's walking distance. The next level were the markets located between two ethnic groups. The third level was the type of centre that served several ethnic groups who travelled considerable distances to reach the location. The final and the highest order of urban centres also served various ethnic groups but were international contact and exchange points, too. (See Figure 1).

#### COLONIAL URBANIZATION: 1895-1962

The first two decades of British colonial rule was a period of radical spatial change during which administrative control was effectively established and the whole infrastructure of colonial dominance was implemented. The establishment of colonial rule at the Coast followed the partition of the East African region by the Europeans. The ten mile coastal



*Figure 1* The main pre-colonial towns in the coastal region of Kenya up to 1850  
(Source: Obudho 1993a, p. 8)

strip from Tunghi Bay in the south to the mouth of the Tana River in the north, which was nominally ruled by the Sultan of Zanzibar, was taken up by the Imperial British East Africa Company (IBEAC) and entrusted to the British governments to occupy and administer it

During the colonial period the organization of the urban centres was developed and consolidated in both time and space (Obudho 1982; 1983). With the transfer of the activities of the IBEAC to the colonial office, some caravan trade centres were developed as administrative centres. In order to improve communication in the area, railways, roads and associated infrastructures were built between 1895 and 1902. The major means of transportation which was constructed at this time was, first, Sclater's Road (a cart track for wheeled transport), followed by the Uganda Railway from Mombasa to Port Florence (present Kisumu) on Lake Victoria (Hake 1977).

While population growth at the Coast remained stable, Nairobi increased in importance and became not only the capital of Kenya but also of East Africa. As for the development of the coastal urban centres, there was a strong tendency on the part of the colonial government to regard these as non-African areas in which Africans came only to work temporarily. The colonial law emphasized that the African reserves were the proper place for the Africans and their presence in the urban centres was not allowed except when required. Most of the Africans who migrated to the coastal towns created outlying squatter rings in the peri-urban areas, thus forming the basis of the slum and squatter settlements of today (Obudho & Aduwo 1979).

The colonial administrators established urban centres as a force in consolidating their economic and political interests at the Coast. The centres were dominated by the non-African elites which consisted of two groups, namely, the intelligentsia and the traditional elites. The former had received a formal education in the same colonial urban centres or overseas, while the latter had risen to power through the ethnic political process. Both groups were closely related to the colonial elites who were mainly administrators and businessmen. Another group were the middlemen who consisted of Asian and Arab immigrants and who occupied a very important commercial niche.

Colonization implied a deliberately segregated economic, political and socio-cultural climate in which the Europeans dominated the country and the Asians acted as the "middlemen" while the Africans worked in low-paying jobs in urban areas or were otherwise restricted to their respective areas of origin. Apart from the polarized nature of the urbanization process, the colonization also produced specific traits. For instance, the colonial urban centres were more racially and ethnically heterogeneous than the pre-colonial settlements, but it was common to find the indigenous Africans from the surrounding areas accounting for the majority of the population.

A quantitative analysis of colonial urban development is only possible for the period after 1948, the year of the first country-wide population census. According to this census, there were only four urban centres at the Coast with a minimum population of 2,000 whose inhabitants totalled almost 100,000 (Table 1). The second national population census which was held in 1962 showed that the number of urban centres had increased from four to five and the total urban population had doubled. In both census years, Mom-



basa alone accounted for about 90% of the urban population and showed the highest increase between the two years. Lamu and particularly Voi are conspicuous in that their populations actually declined during the period.

*Table 1* Urban population, 1948 and 1962

urban centre	1948	1962	Av. growth rate (%)	% increase
Mombasa	84,746	179,575	5.5	111.9
Lamu	5,868	5,828	0.0	- 0.7
Malindi	3,292	5,818	4.2	76.7
Voi	3,632	2,533	- 2.5	- 30.3
Kilifi	--	2,018	--	--
Total	97,538	195,772	5.4	100.7

*Sources:* Kenya 1949; 1964.

#### THE POST-COLONIAL ERA: 1963-1995

After independence, the number of urban centres with 2,000 or more inhabitants grew from the five in 1962 to fifteen in 1989 (Table 2). The increase took place in all size groups. During the same period, the urban population at the Coast almost tripled to about 580,000. Table 3 shows that between 1979 and 1989, average population growth in the centres with less than 20,000 inhabitants was much higher than in the two largest categories (and especially Mombasa), showing both the slowing down of primacy in the region and also the increasing importance of small and intermediate urban centres (Obudho 1993b), at least in terms of population size.

*Table 2* Number of urban centres by size category, 1948-1989

	'48	'62	'69	'79	'89
100,000+	0	1	1	1	1
20,000-99,999	1	0	0	1	1
10,000-19,999	0	0	1	0	3
5,000-9,999	1	2	2	5	5
2,000-4,999	2	2	4	4	5
Total	4	5	8	11	15

*Sources:* Kenya 1949; 1964; 1970; 1981; 1994b.

This growth of the urban population in the region can be explained by a number of factors such as the high rate of rural-urban migration, a generally high rate of urban natural growth rate, boundary changes of the urban centres as well as other non-spatial factors such as national industrial, labour and migration policies. The pattern of urbanization is such that the urban population is concentrated in areas which have experienced intense resource development. This state of affairs has been this way for a long time and the trend of intra-regional variation has changed only slightly. Particularly Mombasa and the narrow coastal strip north and south of this town are 'over-developed' compared to the remainder of the region and hence attracted the bulk of the migrants.

The Coast is the second most urbanized region in the country after the Nairobi region. The distribution of the urban population within the region shows a wide gap between the

Municipality of Mombasa on the one hand and the small and intermediate urban centres on the other. In 1989, the Municipality of Mombasa alone accounted for about 80% of the urban population (Table 3). The main reason for this is Mombasa's unique location as a major East African port (Obudho 1992c).

Table 3 Urban centres<sup>a</sup>, 1969-1989

National rank	Urban centre	District	1969	1979	1989	Av. growth rate '79-'89 (%)	Sex ratio (b) 1989
2	Mombasa	Mombasa	247,073	341,148	461,753	3.03	125
15	Malindi	Kilifi <sup>c</sup>	10,757	23,275	34,047	3.80	122
35	Kilifi	Kilifi	2,662	5,886	14,145	8.80	105
37	Voi	Taita Taveta	5,313	7,397	13,202	5.79	110
46	Taveta	Taita Taveta	n.a.	1,812	10,378	17.45	105
55	Lamu	Lamu	7,403	8,394	8,959	0.65	107
57	Mariakani	Kilifi	n.a.	2,766	8,372	11.07	99
58	Lungalunga	Kwale	n.a.	1,671	7,926	15.57	97
73	Msambweni	Kwale	n.a.	6,117	5,680	- 0.74	92
100	Kwale	Kwale	1,092	2,200	3,510	4.67	123
105	Garsen	Tana River	n.a.	1,007	3,186	11.52	108
110	Mambrui	Kilifi <sup>c</sup>	n.a.	1,457	2,951	7.06	91
115	Wundanyi	Taita Taveta	n.a.	389	2,764	19.61	106
135	Watamu	Kilifi <sup>c</sup>	n.a.	2,188	2,089	- 0.46	151
Total urban population			283,652	401,639	578,962	3.7	122

Notes: a. Hola (pop. 1989: 9,508) is excluded in this table.

b. Number of males per 100 females.

c. Now Malindi District.

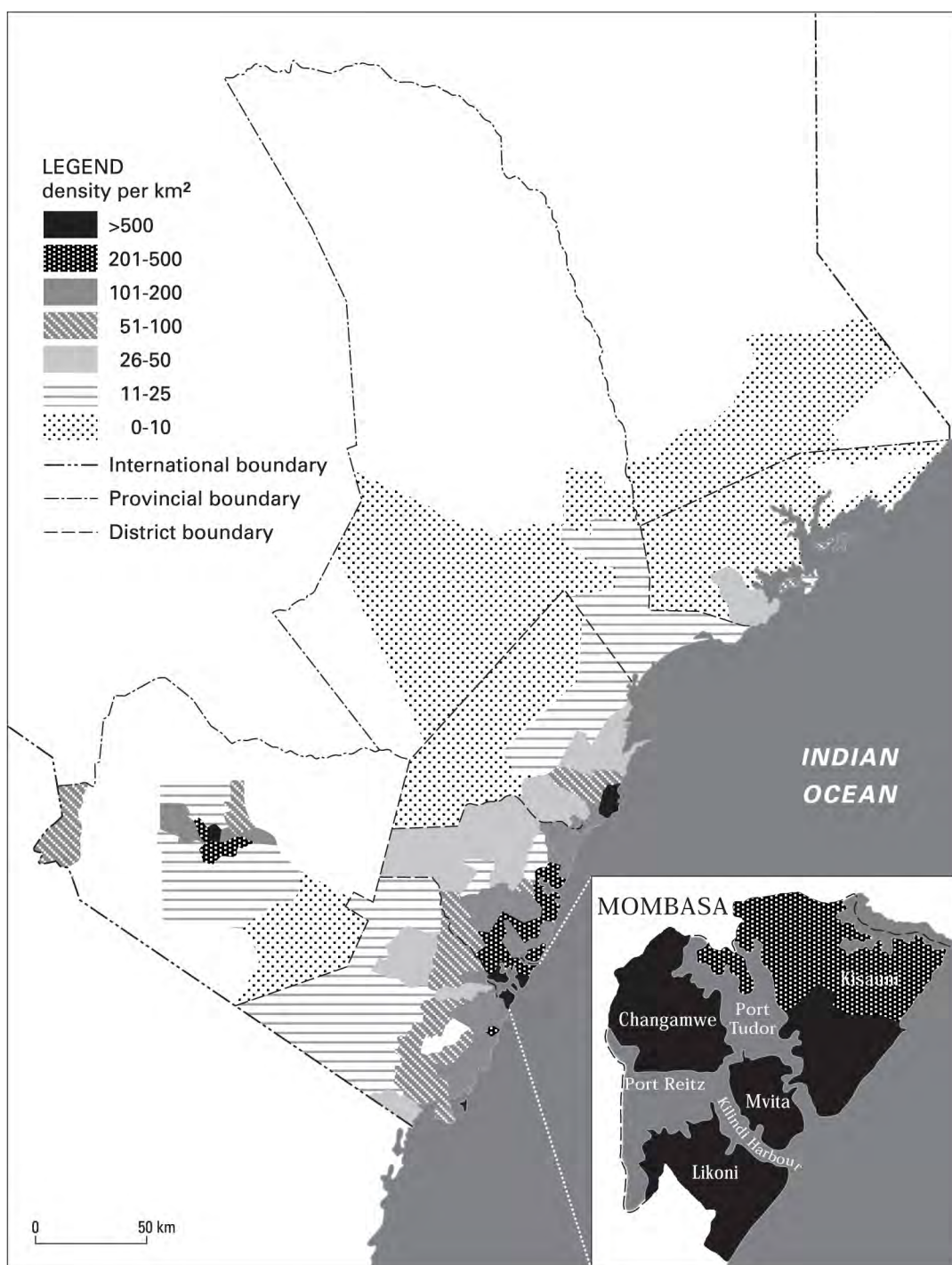
Sources: Kenya 1970; 1981; 1994b; 1996.

According to the 1989 population census, the Coast had a total urban population of almost 580,000. Except for Lamu, Msambweni and Watamu, all urban centres had a very high growth rate between 1979 and 1989 (Table 3). And except for Msambweni and Mambrui, all urban centres in the region were male-dominated. The functions of all these centres are mainly administrative, commercial, political, religious and economic. The rank in population reflects their degree of importance in the hierarchy which will now be highlighted by discussing urbanization by district.

#### URBANIZATION BY DISTRICT

##### *Mombasa*

Though in size about one-third of Nairobi, Mombasa is the second town of Kenya, with a 1989 population of almost half a million people. Like Nairobi, the municipality is a district at the same time. Its oldest and prime function is the harbour, which is the largest of the whole East African coast, serving not only Kenya but also many other parts of eastern Africa. Because of the port activities, the town is also the second industrial town of the country. Moreover, being the capital of Coast Province, it is an important administrative centre, too. Finally, because of its location and historical places of interest, it is a major tourist attraction as well.



**Figure 2** Population density  
(Source: Kenya 1994a) *Note:* Population densities are based on the administrative unit of the location. Especially in Lamu District and in the areas west of the Coastal Range in Kwale and Kilifi Districts locations tend to be quite big and may hide smaller population concentrations at the sub-locational level.

In Mombasa District, Mombasa Island Division has the largest proportion (41%) of the total urban population followed by Changamwe (24%). This pattern is attributed to the fact that Changamwe and Mombasa Island have the largest share of infrastructure thereby attracting more people. Likoni has the lowest proportion (12%), which is mainly due to the lack of proper transportation linkages with the other divisions. The 1979 population density of the district was 1,624 persons per km<sup>2</sup> and is expected to increase to 2,800 by the year 2000. (See Figure 2). This makes Mombasa District the most densely populated district in the country. At divisional level, Mombasa Island has the highest density of 10,639 persons per km<sup>2</sup> (1989), which was projected to increase steadily up to about 18,000 in the year 2000.

#### *Kilifi and Malindi Districts*

Kilifi and Malindi Districts<sup>2</sup> have five centres with a population of more than 2,000: Malindi, Kilifi, Mariakani, Mambrui and Watamu. In 1989, Malindi had a population of about 34,000, Kilifi about 14,000 and Mariakani about 8,400. Compared with 1979, the population of Malindi, Kilifi and Mariakani had more than doubled by 1989. However, in terms of services, Malindi is an important regional centre with a large array of facilities, the more so since it became the headquarters of the district with the same name. Kilifi town, on the other hand, is an administrative centre which serves the entire district with facilities such as farm inputs and household goods. Mariakani, because of its location, serves also (parts of) Mombasa, Kwale and Taita Taveta Districts. It is located on the Nairobi-Mombasa road and at the border of Kwale and Kilifi Districts.

The districts also have many small and intermediate centres (gazetted as rural centre, market centre or local centre) which derive their names mostly from the local areas they serve; hence, the population they service is close to the population of those areas. Most of these centres are transaction points for agricultural farm produce and livestock marketing. They also act as points where farm inputs, household goods and other services are available. Some of them have sprung up because of the (nearby) existence of factories or mining activities while others began as administrative and market centres.

The urban and rural centres tend to be located in the high potential areas. Furthermore, they tend to be concentrated in areas with electricity, roads and water. These areas are found within the corridor of the districts along the coastal belt and the coastal range, including Malindi, Gede, Watamu, Chumani, Kilifi, Vipingo, Takaungu, Mtwapa, Mazeras, Kaloleni and Mariakani. Finally, Bamba is a rapidly growing centre because of its animal holding grounds.

#### *Kwale District*

Like most rural districts in Kenya, Kwale has a very low level of urbanization. Evidence from the 1969 and 1979 census data suggests that only 1.7% and 4.4% of the total district population were living in towns in those two years, respectively. The intercensal increase

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2. In 1997 Malindi Division or Sub-District was separated from Kilifi District to form Malindi district.

of 2.7% in the level of urbanization was very low indeed. According to the 1989 census, Kwale District had only one urban centre with a population of more than 2,000. The officially designated service centres are two urban centres (Kwale and Kinango), two rural centres (Ukunda and Msambweni), eight market centres and thirty-five local centres.

Although small in size, Kwale town has become an important centre because of its administrative functions as the district headquarters. In 1979, its population was 2,200. Kwale District's proximity to Mombasa has adversely affected its growth in terms of services offered. To date there are less than 20 shops with numerous kiosks mainly selling basic commodities. The town has a market which operates daily and deals mainly in vegetables, fruits and dried fish. There are no major industrial undertakings in the town, but a cashew nut plant and a bakery are expected to take off soon. Land has been set aside for industrial development but as yet very few investors have shown interest.

The other urban centre of significance is Kinango, a divisional headquarters, which offers services to the hinterland in a semi-arid environment. Kinango benefited from the rural electrification programme since 1985 but its growth has been hampered mainly by lack of land for development, lack of an adequate water supply system and poor communication. Kinango is an important centre for livestock auctions which take place once a week. With the proposed tarmacking of the Kwale-Kinango road, the current communication problems will be minimized. An additional solution would be the improvement of the road connecting Kinango directly to the main Mombasa-Nairobi road.

Ukunda, although classified as a rural centre, has been growing steadily due to the number of hotels and cottages that have been put up at the South Coast of Diani. Ukunda has attracted many people waiting in and outside Kwale in search of employment in the tourist industry in Diani. However, due to lack of adequate housing, a number of people employed in the hotel industry have to commute from Mombasa or from the other local centres along the Mombasa-Lunga Lungu road.

#### *Lamu District*

The most populated urban centre in Lamu District is Lamu town, the district headquarters, which counted about 9,000 people in 1989. It is followed by smaller centres like Mpeketoni, Witu, Mukowe, Faza and Kiunga whose populations are below 2,000. These are market centres and divisional headquarters and are located along the major commercial routes in the district.

Lack of basic infrastructure such as a proper road network, adequate supply of fresh water and electricity, has hampered industrialization and urbanization in the district. Most of the centres are involved in retail trade, mainly in distributing foodstuffs of which the district is a net importer. Fishing being the mainstay of the economy, most of the centres are fishing villages. Mangrove cutting is common mainly in the islands. Most of the mangrove poles are consumed outside the district, however. Boat construction and repair are economic activities prevalent in most of the centres.

Agricultural output, mainly foodstuffs, are consumed locally and surpluses are sent to the Kenya National Cereals and Produce Board depot at Mokowe. Cotton is sold to Lamu

Ginners Co. Ltd. who are the agents for the Cotton Board. Mpeketoni, located in Lake Kenyatta Settlement Scheme, is the outlet for foodstuffs from the scheme. The rest of the foodstuffs are consumed in Lamu town. The government service provision points are located in Lamu and Mukowe centres. Services are also administered from the divisional headquarters.

#### *Tana River District*

The Tana River District headquarters is in Hola with a resident population of about 9,500 people in 1989. Garsen is ranked second in the district in terms of business activities. It also serves as a midpoint for people travelling from Mombasa to Lamu or Hola. Tana River District has no gazetted urban centres. However, there are four centres which are growing rapidly, notably Hola, Garsen, Bura and Magondo. These centres are the headquarters of their respective divisions. There are only two rural centres and four market centres, mainly found in Garsen Division; local centres are generally found along the River Tana.

The distribution of designated services in the district is uneven and the services rendered by most of the centres are very poor. Many people, particularly those in the inland, have to travel long distances to visit a service centre. More essential facilities should be provided to these centres so that they can serve the district population adequately

#### *Taita Taveta District*

Taita Taveta District has three major urban centres, namely Voi, Wundanyi and Taveta. The population of Taveta increased more than five-fold between 1979 and 1989, i.e. from about 1,800 to more than 10,000. It grew at an average annual rate of 18.8%. Wundanyi, which is the district headquarters, had a population of only 389 in 1979. This figure increased to 2,764 in 1989, which implies an annual average annual growth rate of 19%. The increase of Taveta could be due to the growth of cash crop farming and the related agri-business. The population of Voi is relatively small. Areas such as Kishushe, Kisigau, Njukini, Kiorigho, Rong'e Juu and Mwanda have seasonal problems with access to major market centres. The problem arises during the rainy season when parts of the roads are washed away.

#### CONCLUSION

The majority of the pre-colonial urban centres in Kenya were concentrated in the Coast, with only half a dozen on the Mombasa-Uganda route. These nodal points were very important for the dissemination of goods and ideas. The pre-colonial central places were mainly periodic market centres where traditional chiefs gathered from time to time to carry out the administrative functions of their respective spheres of influence. Only the non-indigenous, such as the Arab and Indian traders, resided there. In this sense, some of the pre-colonial urban centres in the coastal region could be called multi-racial societies. The indigenous ethnic groups accounted for over 90% of the population but the coastal centres were controlled by an exogenous elite, mainly Arab and Swahili merchants.

To some extent, these pre-colonial central places acted as nodes from which the colonial authorities secured a strong foothold in various parts of Kenya. Urbanization was more or less kept in check, however, which was mainly due to the migration restrictions imposed on the indigenous population. After Independence, all restrictive regulations were abolished, resulting in an influx of migrants from up-country, particularly to Mombasa. This migration stream continues to the present day.

The most alarming aspect of the growth of the urban population in the coastal region is, therefore, its rapidity rather than the relative sizes of the urban and rural populations. This trend is likely to go on and may well accelerate if measures are not taken to control it. The primary causes of urban population growth are urban natural growth, rural-urban migration, boundary expansion and the emergence of new market centres. These four factors have operated together to produce the high rate of population growth in urban centres. An effective urban and regional planning policy for the Coast will necessarily take into consideration, either directly or indirectly and separately or in unison, all the above four factors. Special emphasis needs to be placed on the small and intermediate urban centres whose role is likely to increase (Obudho 1993b). Future urban policies for the area should gain control over unmanageable growth of urbanization and sub-urbanization processes; develop alternative methods of providing low-cost urban services; recover investment costs to permit financial replaceability; strengthen municipal institutions to perform efficient management functions; stimulate community participation; and develop economic and institutional links with the inland.

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## REVIEW DETAILS

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### *Source*

Obudho R.A. (2000). Urbanization. In Hoorweg J., Foeken D. & Obudho R. eds. *Kenya Coast Handbook: Culture, resources and development in the East African littoral*. (pp. 85-97). Hamburg: LIT Verlag