

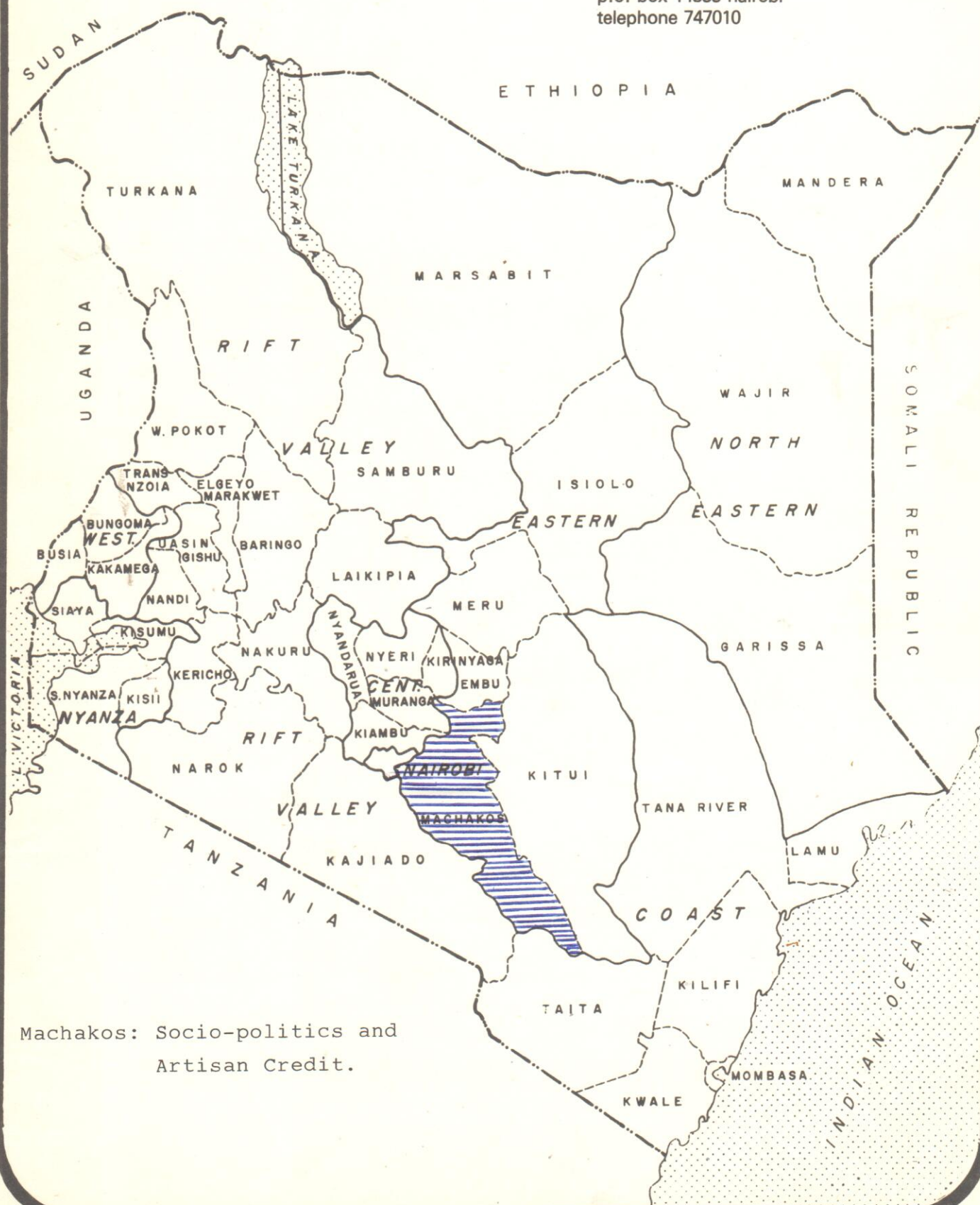


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Machakos: Socio-politics and
Artisan Credit.

Terms of Reference.

Mr. Willi Haan verbally briefed Prof. G-C.M. Mutiso on the terms of reference at the FES Office on 23rd January 1986. In summary form two tasks were supposed to be done by the consultant. These are :-

1. To write on the socio-political background of Machakos as it might affect the planned project and to suggest entry communities.
2. To identify an individual who might be used by FES for more detailed probing into the social structure of the artisan community.

Method of Implementation.

It was made clear that the consultant was not to do extensive field work but rather to write a report identifying what FES ought to look out for in planning the project. However the consultant felt that it was important to visit four areas where artisans are concentrated. These are Machakos Town, Matuu, Tala/Kangundo and Wamunyu.

The visits were important for checking possible links of the project to ongoing development work and also in identifying individuals who could play the second project role by discussing with informants who live in these communities and who are known by the consultant.

Machakos District Socio-political Framework and Credit.

Of concern to FES is whether there are socio-political practices in Machakos District which militate against an artisan credit system.

On the outset there does not seem to be any for, to the best of my knowledge, no formal political leaders or institutions have been arguing this in the district. If anything the opposite is true. The major political leaders Hon. Mulu Mutisya and J.P. Ngei are on record in DDC meetings and private political discussions urging those who take public sector credit to repay so as to facilitate more credit to other people in the district.

Provincial administration and other government bodies have made the same point.

According to bankers the repayment rate of credit in the District is higher than elsewhere.

There is extensive tradition of local credit in the communities. This usually is in form of mwethya groups who raise funds and donate to each member in the same way they raise labour power and donate it to an individual.

Socially credit is accepted for the extensive cooperatives have in recent times been used to give food credit, school fees credit, not to talk of farm production credit.

In summary then there aren't peculiar traditions or political groups which militate against credit systems. However having said this one must candidly state that the factionalisation of district politics could have a bearing on a credit system, if the project was to be seen as strictly contributing to a factional advantage. Thus any credit system must straddle the factions by serving all members. It is therefore important to contain the factional socio-political organisers in design and implementation.

Machakos Town Background.

This town, established during the last century, would have become the capital of Kenya had it not been bypassed by the railroad at the turn of the century. It remained a sleepy commercial town with very little 'industrial' activity until recently.. Bad roads into it from the district hinterland diverted district trade to Thika and Nairobi.

Recently the boundaries of the Township have been extended to cover a vast area stretching all the way to Mombasa road, reaching the tops of Iveti and Mua Hills and embracing Kiima Kimwe. As a result, the 1979 POPULATION CENSUS. VOL.11 ANALYTICAL REPORT shows Machakos Town as the fifth largest urban centre with a population of 84,320. This is a dramatic jump from only 6,312 in the 1969 census.

Although the boundaries have been expanded to include areas which could be considered rural, the outlying locations have very high densities which rival most urban areas. The average town density is 260 persons per square kilometre which incidentally is below the densities found in parts of Kangundo and Mbooni.

No study exists on rates of immigration to the township area but the extensive construction within the township shows that a great deal of current population are new arrivals.

No physical plan exists for the township. Construction of residential, commercial and industrial buildings has taken place at random. Particularly problematic are the areas of 'Eastleigh' - behind the Provincial Hospital - where residential buildings were put up before the area got absorbed into the town and where no services plots for roads and sewers are left.

At the old Majengo - a buspark was constructed in the middle of this old slum residential area. It is yet to be used. Sand-wiched between Majengo, the old market and the shopping area is Grogan - the major Jua Kali arena. It grew in the last twenty years on this steep land next to a streamlet on what is Council land.

According to the old Township rough physical plan, all artisan activities were supposed to be miles away to the west of Kilungu Road where Kenya Industrial Estate, Cooperative Union Godowns and a few other industries are located. A few artisans are found there. The rest are scattered around the town.

The Jua Kali artisans argue that they will not move from Grogan for several reasons. They are within a bloc of the major furniture selling street. They are also within two blocs of the functioning bus park and thus are conveniently located for the travelling buyer. One artisan with a sense of humour points out that they are within two blocs of the hospital ! Grogan has only recently grown. Its growth like that of the rest of the district is dependent on several recent activities in the district and the township in particular.

Township Politics in 1980s.

The town was administered by the County Council until late seventies when it first started running its affairs.

Politics in Machakos has essentially been an issue of those who support the Ngei Faction and those who do not.

The first Mayor of Machakos Town Mr. Muia (Tumba) was in the anti-Ngei faction. His activities in dishing out plots, the major patronage activity of the town council, is credited with creating a boom in Machakos from the mid-seventies to eighties. All plots available, whether belonging to Commissioner of Lands or County Council land were put on the patronage bloc. They were allocated and people built without much attention to building codes or plans. Since his influence extended to the County Council a lot of land was opened up for building.

The growth of artisan community is related to this patronage system. Infact the first Mayor, Muia, has a garage in Grogan under his son. His allies eg current Deputy Mayor Malatu (Kambu) has a mechanic school outside Grogan. Munyao Kiilu has interests in various rented properties being used by artisans. Stone Kathuli has one of the major timber supply houses.

On the Ngei faction individuals who have been key supporters in the Council and in other political operations in the district and town have businesses which rely on artisans or are indirect investors in the sector (through kiosks, shops plots and businesses which supply the sector, Examples are Itumo (Titi) in furniture, Nthenge (Wasyo) in supplies, Muia Many'unza in plots and supplies, Gideon Mbole and his brother in plots, supplies etc.

However it is not just the openly political types who control resources which link with the sector. Even residually Asian businesses like Akamba Timber - possibly the largest timber and hardware business in the district - have from time to time had some politicians and influential Kambas on their boards. As suppliers to the sector they are important sources of credit which can be influenced by politics.

Jua Kali as Source of Political Muscle.

The manipulation of Jua Kali sector takes place most nakedly when there are political struggles or elections. Above I have indicated names of individuals who because of their political locale have access to resources needed by the sector. This is not the major source of control though. The sector has access to a lot of people who come to buy. By the same token when large businesses get orders, they sometimes farm the work to the sector. Thirdly some, eg furniture makers and mattress fundis, need formal sector outlets (ie shops) sometimes controlled by the politicals. To maintain their 'businesses' they are obliged to come out when there is political organising.

Any political meeting or demonstration in the town usually has a lot more people from this sector than any other (with a possible exception of Majengo). The reason is simply that this niche's income is generally low and economic pressure can be brought to bear on their participation. They are either paid off in patronage, credit or cash. This must be one of the first point to deal with in credit project design.

Of course within Jua Kali sectors' social structure are the few who have been in it for a longtime and have thus become leaders by their own right eg Zakariah Ngongo - a tinsmith, or Komu - a mechanic.

There are others who have entered from employment sector to an activity of great demand and are therefore accumulating and getting respect among their peers eg Tailor Maweu - the only one in jute mattress-making. Yet there are the great number of day casuals (spanner boys etc) who are the cannon fodder for the politicals. They can earn Shs.20 by working or demonstrating. In a way these are the poorest of the Jua Kali sector and the ones not likely to be caught by any development projects. They incidentally are the majority. They are likely to 'work' on jikos or engines or even turn itinerant sugarcane sellers on any given day.

Economic Base of Jua Kali Sector.

A walk through Grogan led to the following activities being identified :-

1. Tyre shoe making.
2. Ordinary charcoal jikos being made (One fundi was identified by the others as the only one who knows and makes claylined jikos on order. He claimed that relatively near sources of pot clay crack and he has to bring it from Mbooni. Incidentally he sells improved jikos for Shs.60).
3. Assorted motor mechanics.
4. Tin Smiths - making lamps, sufuria, Jembe etc.
5. Carpenters - making low cost furniture .
6. Assorted Black Smiths - forging and shaping metal for others.
7. Gas welders.

Conspicuously missing were :-

1. Equipment repairers - watches, pumps etc - who are intermingled with other commercial activities in other areas.
2. Steel window makers - who are in commercial areas with electricity.
3. Wood carvers - who are concentrated in Wamunyu.
4. Tyre repairers - who are in centre of town.

It is clear then that the Township Jua Kali concentrates on low income high demand articles (tire shoes - paraffin tin-wick lamps, ordinary jikos) and general repairs - mechanical vehicle (and not cart) and gas welding.

These items are in major demand by the low income travellers. Commercial buyers from other parts of the district buy and transport to retail in the outlying village shops.

Assets by Jua Kali.

These are kiosks licenced by the Town Council for a few of the Jua Kali artisans. Those who have been there longest like Komu, Ngongo and those tied to politicals have built permanent structures on plots allocated to them personally. The kiosk owners do not enjoy this permanent tenure.

The majority of the kiosks are built with wooden offcuts and have recycled iron sheet roofs.

Compared to Gikomba in Nairobi there are very few tools visible in the sheds. This issue will need to be investigated further if the plan is to use tools and implements as loan collateral.

Problem of Masons, Painters, Roof Fundis.

There is not a single place that I or my informants know where masons, painters and roof fundis congregate as is the case in Nairobi and other towns. One is told that most of them are tied to the main supply houses and politicals especially Muia (Tumba). It is said that he controls most construction. This will need investigation for with all the construction going on there must be a place where they meet if for no other reason to exchange information. It is possible some of the new migrants look for fundis from their homes.

These three categories are usually in great demand.

My own experience with this category of artisans is that many of them from the town environs have migrated to rural areas of the district. Some of them who I know, argue that whatever work is found in Machakos is either for large contractors or is controlled by the politicals. A few others claim that as fundis they can earn more money and be employed more regularly outside the town where members of the rural elite - especially teachers - are always building their dwelling houses and where there always is work in extension of shops in rural centres.

Possibilities of Artisan Credit.

Behind the request of this consultancy was a concern that elsewhere there are artisans who feel that all loans are not to be paid.

Let me first state that there is throughout the country a cadre of people who because of linkages to the politicals have had this view. However since 1978 the national political leadership has been pushing the idea that all forms of loans are to be paid. Since then, and particularly in the last two years, major politicals who have not honored their debts have been auctioned or bankrupted. Surely there must be salutary impact of this to the wider society.

In Machakos township for the past four years, loan repayment enforcement, particularly by the District Cooperative Union and AFC has been stringent. People openly state that all loans must be repaid in casual conversations.

These facts lead me to suppose that an artisan credit system should not be too problematic particularly if the pitfall of working with the major politicals in the township is avoided.

FES indicated that they would like to get a person from the area to work on the social structure of the artisan community. This is a sensible idea. I only would like to suggest that since my exploratory visit did reveal some oldtimers who are the community wazee, FES should try and get somebody from the informal sector to be the one interacting with his peers as far as discussing credit possibilities.

Such a person is Josphat Maingi who runs two newspaper kiosks within the town and who is informed about the community.

Two other individuals are important given their structural location and rapport with the sector. They are G. Muia Kalla (Box 499, Machakos) and J.R. Muinde Nganga (Box 87 Machakos. Phone 21212)

Kalla has been a private accountant in Machakos town for a longtime. He has risen to be a 'consultant' to the whole informal sector over the years. Infact his office handles more informal sector problems than the primary occupation. He has not been involved in the factional politics although he is active in cooperatives.

Nganga on the other hand has the same stature from his own work with Domestic and Hotel Keepers Union. Similarly he has avoided the factional infighting. Inspite of experience with labour union organisers elsewhere, I would recommend him as a major resource.

I believe that an agency can be better served by community based leaders than even consultants from that community for they know the interior power plays not visible to the outsider. FES should tap these two who are extremely knowledgeable about the town and whose habitue is next to Grogan.

FES could also consider tying the credit project to the Catholic Diocese Development Office which has extensive community activities. They do not give credit to this sector to the best of my knowledge but their previous record in community organising is extremely good and it could come in handy.

I already mentioned to FES that inspite of the hostility against cooperatives that Machakos Cooperative Union linkup maybe worth exploring for it is soundly run now.

Other Sites in Machakos District.

1) Matuu.

Matuu Jua Kali Artisans are on the whole doing similar activities to those at Machakos town. They are however advantaged in the sense that their immediate environ, which is dominated by the irrigation canal, is cash awash all year round. They thus market their wares immediately. Their trade networks, also extend to Kitui, Muranga, Thika and Embu.

Beyond the activities found in Machakos, they extensively repair modern agriculture equipment, particularly spray pumps.

Where Machakos town has almost entirely Kamba artisans, at Matuu there is a polyphony of tribes. This clearly will make organising much more complicated for there are tensions between the various groups at Matuu.

I thus agree with the already expressed FES view that they are considering entering the District through Machakos Town. Matuu would be a worthy second entry.

Some sector contacts would be :-

Peter Mutiso, - carpenter, Paul Muindu Nyangi - carpenter, Hamisi - mechanic, John Wambua - mason, Paul Kyondo - welder. A good organiser would be Mulli Ndolo who is a mason and is accepted by others as a leader. Mzee Greg Kathilu (of Box 223, Matuu) would be an important community resource.

2. Tala/Kangundo.

There are not as many Jua Kali artisans as either at Matuu. The range is limited to steel window makers, wood workers, tyre shoe makers, few tinsmiths - etc. The hinterland is coffee zone and most repairs relate to that. It is not a major source of commercial supplies of artisan products for Machakos, Thika and Nairobi dominate that role. Since it is not on major trade route, it possibly will never build an artisan base catering to other rural areas like Machakos.

Some sector contacts would be :-

Bernard Muisyo Makau - mechanic , Kitolo Mulei - mechanic, Kilonzo Maitha - carpenter, Musyoki Nyangi - welder, Hussein Mwanthi - mechanic, Zakayo Musembi - welder. A good organiser would be Mwanzia Kiasya (Box 1295) Kangundo.

A community leader who would be helpful as a resource is mzee J. M. Kithome of Box 1295, Kangundo.

3. Wamunyu Wood-Carvers.

Carving is a major industry at Wamunyu. Infact people from there dominate the carving industry nationally and their trade networks stretch around the globe.

However the carvers are increasingly being held hostage by large operators as carving wood prices skyrocket. The creation of a carving cooperative has not solved the artisan problem for its marketing is systematically undercut by large operators.

As many as 500 artisans are involved in the location. If FES was interested in pioneering intervention in a system where working resources (wood) and marketing are critical for the existence of an artisan, perhaps no more challenging situation exists than the Wamunyu carvers.

Here the political factions would not be a factor for the major issue is really who controls the wood source. Since artisans cannot afford to buy carving wood they are huddled into minifactories which supply it, and more often than not these same minifactory owners buy either the unpolished product (for polishing under different factory setups) or the finished product. Independent artisans are increasingly being marginalised inspite of the fact that this activity is a high income earner.

If a Wamunyu project were generated other artisans, who are into beds, blacksmith, tyre shoe makers, masons, etc could be serviced by the project.

Possible artisan contacts are :-

Mulli Mumo - who sells traditional beds, door frames and poles in the market and who could act as organiser,
Kilonzo Musanga - mason, Mutweia Kiseko - blacksmith and
Ndaka Ndile - wood carver.