

The Impact of the Second World War on Livestock Industry among the Akamba of Machakos, 1939-1945

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Abstract

This paper set out to examine the impact of world War Two on livestock economy among the Akamba of Machakos between 1939 and 1945. Specifically, it analyses how various colonial policies during the period of the Second World War altered the livestock economy among the Akamba of Machakos. Data collection for the study was done through primary and secondary sources. Primary sources involved the use of vast archival materials which provided the official state position on the topic. Oral interviews with selected informants helped to reveal the Akamba perception on the livestock economy in the area during the period under study. The target population consisted of people who were involved in livestock management or trade during World War II. Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used to select a sample of 24 informants who were well versed with Akamba livestock economy. In addition, secondary sources were utilized. They included books, journal articles, dissertations and unpublished documents. Data was analyzed using qualitative method. The study established that the outbreak of the Second World War had adverse effects on the livestock economy among the Akamba of Machakos.

Keywords: Akamba, World War II, Livestock Economy

1.1 Introduction

The Second World War period was a critical one in African history. The period was decisive in the history of the colonial economy of Kenya as a whole and Machakos in particular. The initial years of the war saw diminished demand for African exports and serious shortages of imported goods. The period was also marked by the increased demand for foodstuff particularly to meet the war food requirements to the allied troops. Thus, the colonial state in Kenya and the colonial office in London sought to transform the rural landscape of Kenya into an efficient and specialized production unit for livestock and grain crops to meet the war food demands. As a result, the colonial government encouraged greater production of food crops, particularly maize. The returns from cash crop exports were siphoned off by the colonial government to finance British military purchases. On the other hand, the over emphasis on cash crop production led to serious soil erosion in the African reserves. The government also increased the requisitioning for livestock at this time. To achieve this, the colonial government ordered compulsory sale of livestock to the Meat Supply Board. In addition, thousands of men from Machakos district were recruited into the colonial army. This shifted the labour hitherto dedicated to livestock towards the military service. The shift of attention from livestock to military labour, cash crop production, the resulting soil erosion, combined with livestock exports and unfavorable weather culminated into two major wartime famines while also contributing to severe livestock depletion in Machakos. Therefore, there is no doubt that the war had a profound impact on the overall performance of the economy of Machakos district. This paper discusses the evolution of livestock production and overall trajectory of economic development in Machakos within the context of the Second World War.

1.2 Requisitioning for Livestock

The outbreak of the Second World War had far reaching repercussions on the livestock economy of Machakos. The main effect emerged to be the considerable loss of livestock through forced sale. The establishment of Meat Control Board following the outbreak of the war intensified livestock commoditization among the Akamba of Machakos.

The monthly quota for each district was fixed according to the number of livestock in each district as estimated by the administration.¹ As Zeleza stresses, ‘the immediate task of the colonial government at this time became that of ‘the mobilization of all the potential resources of the colonial empire both of men and materials, for the purposes of the war.’ Chiefs became crucial instruments for the mobilization of human and material resources to meet the increasing demands of the War. Once the DC got the quota for his district from the colonial administration, he divided the quota according to the number of the locations and ordered the chiefs to ensure that their locations met their quota.² Livestock became one of the important resources whose demand increased tremendously as the colonial government required meat in large quantities for the provisions of the troops. This meant that livestock had to be obtained from all parts of Kenya using all possible means.³ As such, every homestead in Machakos had to part with some livestock for the war requirements. The increased demand for livestock and the subsequent launching of the requisitions by the colonial state seriously affected livestock prices not only in Machakos but also in other parts of Kenya. This occasioned a plunge of livestock in the market which in turn led to the supply outstripping the demand in the local markets.

The imbalance between supply and demand resulted in low prices of livestock. Consequently, livestock owners were left with no choice but to sell at the low prices offered. The low prices were alarmingly low that it became a major concern.⁴ For instance, whereas in 1938 an ox could fetch 50-60 shillings, in 1940, the price dropped to as low as Shs 32 and Shs 34 in 1942. Some livestock owners in Machakos refused to sell their livestock citing the low prices. To add salt to the injury, in 1943, owing to the onset of the *Mwolyo* famine, the condition worsened. The livestock prices dropped even further. At the same time, price differentials between the settlers and the Africans were also witnessed. For example, the settler first grade beef was sold at Shs 34 per 100 Ib while African beef of the same quality was sold at Shs 26. In fact, European cattle irrespective of quality were always bought as first grade beef. So, settlers would buy African cattle, use it for a while as a work oxen before subsequently selling it as settler cattle.⁵ No wonder then that the Akamba were reluctant to sell their livestock to the colonial administration. For example, in 1943, Some Akamba complained through the Local Native Council that their animals were being bought at ‘next to nothing prices’ and therefore they would not sell them.⁶ Indeed, in the same year, Machakos District failed to meet its quota for cattle. Generally in the whole colony, the colonial administration had to use force to meet the district's annual quota during the war since the prices paid by Meat Supply Board were unacceptable to the African. In Kuria for instance, Chacha⁷ notes that the colonial administration used force to obtain cattle from the Africans. Under such circumstances, the livestock owners in Machakos were forced to sell their cattle in order to avoid them being taken by force. Accordingly, during this time, the Akamba lost a lot of livestock through the forced sales. This is illustrated in table 1 below.

Table 1: Livestock Exported from Machakos during the WW II Period

Year	1939	1940	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945
Cattle	5,060	3282	3,046	2,206	1,089	400	700
Sheep and goats	-	10,876	-	3,594	10,964	50,000	38,779

Source: Machakos District Annual Report, 1939-45: KNA/DC/MKS 1/1/29.

It is evident from table 1 that the Machakos Akamba played a major role in the war effort. Throughout the war period, the colonial state mobilized Akamba resources to meet the war demands. However, as indicated in the table, the number of livestock sold especially cattle kept on declining. This was possibly due to two factors. First, the prices were too low so the Akamba lacked the enthusiasm to sell. Some would even bribe the corrupt chiefs so that they would not be forced to sell their livestock. Secondly, in 1940, Machakos District was invaded by army worms and locusts which cleared the pasture leading to low mortality and also rendering the animals too weak to be sold. The two wartime

¹Zeleza, T. "Kenya and the Second World War, 1939-1950" in W.R. Ochieng' (Ed). *A Modern History of Kenya, 1895-1980* (London, 1989b), 145.

²Mutiso, C.G.M. "Kitui Livestock". *Institute of Development Studies*. Working Paper No. 305, 13.

³Ndege, G. "The Transformation of Cattle Economy in Rongo Division, South Nyanza District, 1900 to 1960". MA Thesis. Kenyatta University. 1989, 137.

⁴G.C.M. Mutiso, "Kitui Livestock", 14.

⁵Zeleza, T. "Kenya and the Second World War", 149.

⁶G.C.M. Mutiso, "Kitui Livestock", 15.

⁷Chacha, B. "Agricultural History of the Abakuria of Kenya from the End of the Nineteenth Century to the mid 1970's." MA Thesis Egerton University. (1999), 121.

famines also made the Akamba to use most of their livestock as food and exchanged others with the kikuyu to obtain grain food. Accordingly, the sales decreased.

The forced sale of livestock considerably reduced the livestock population in Machakos as the district was drained off a high number livestock. The Akamba attempted to recoup their losses by intensifying raiding, but they found the neighboring communities as badly hit as they were. It is therefore very apparent that the continual exploitation of the Akamba livestock economy for military use resulted in the general decline of its performance. Aside from the forced sale of livestock, the persistence of colonial wage labour demands also continued to destabilize the livestock economy of Machakos as illustrated by the analysis in the next section.

1.3 The Increased Preference for Wage Labour

Perhaps the most demanding aspect of the World War II was the withdrawal of labour from Machakos for service in the King's African Rifles (KAR) in addition to other forms of employment. For example, in 1945, there were 15,000 Machakos Akamba in civilian employment, a similar number in the KAR, and many more conscripted as labourers in sisal farms in Thika and others in settler farms and ranches. In short, over 50 per cent of the reserve's able-bodied men were out at work during the early 1940s.⁸

It is important to note that during the Second World War, wage labour especially military service, began to have a greater appeal among the Akamba. This was contrary to what had been witnessed during World War I when the Akamba had shown little interest in military service and actively resisted conscription into the Carrier Corps.⁹ One of the primary reasons for this change in attitude of the Akamba toward military service was the gradual economic transformation of the Akamba Reserves during the 1930s. Throughout the region, new commercial opportunities and the increased desire for material goods, coupled with the growing land shortage and also the dwindling livestock sector, led to increased interest in cash money and wage labor.¹⁰ Added to those factors already mentioned was the introduction of some sort of compulsory destocking in 1938 and the increases in the prices of all imported goods, at the outbreak of the war, especially for such items as blankets, wire, pangas, jembes, etc.¹¹ During the relative prosperity of the pre WWI period, most of the Akamba fulfilled their material needs through the sale of livestock, or in the well-watered areas of Machakos District, through the commercial production of poultry and vegetables for Nairobi markets. As a result, the Akamba entered the labour market selectively. It is for this reason that throughout the decade, most of the District Commissioners who served in Machakos complained of the unwillingness of the Akamba to work on government projects and settler farms.¹² Even many young unestablished Akamba men avoided wage labour because their fathers would pay their taxes by selling livestock, thereby outbidding the government and settlers for their labour.

Unfortunately, with the dwindling land and livestock resources, many Akamba found themselves unable to sustain the previously highly cherished livestock ownership owing to diminished land that would otherwise support the grazing of huge numbers of livestock. Consequently, the Akamba found themselves in different forms of wage labour as shown in table 2 below.

Table 2. Number of Machakos Akamba Engaged in Wage Labour by 1945.

Type of Employment	Formal Employment	Sector	Military Services	Informal employment	sector
Number of Machakos Akamba employed	15, 000		12, 000	1,800	

Source: Machakos District Annual Reports, 1939-45: KNA/DC/MKS 1/1/29.

⁸Machakos District Annual Report, 1945: KNA/DC/MKS 1/1/29, 5

⁹Parsons, T. "Wakamba Warriors are Soldiers of the Queen. The Evolution of the Kamba as a Martial Race, 1890-1970". *Ethnohistory*, Vol. 46, No. 4, (1999) 676.

¹⁰Gupta, D. "A Brief Economic History of the Akamba, with Particular Reference to Labour Supplies". *Journal of East African Research and Development*. Vol. 3, No.1, (1973), 69.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹². Pallaver, K. "Colonial Currencies, Labour Relations, and the Payment of Wages in Early Colonial Kenya", in Karin, H. Karin & P (eds.), *Colonialism, Institutional Change, and Shifts in Global Labour Relations*. (Amsterdam, 2018), 301.

As shown in table 2 above, there were 28, 800 Akamba employed in different sectors during the Second World War. The table further indicates that military service was particularly attractive. This was because of its comparatively higher wages as compared to the other sectors. The twenty eight shillings per month plus food and clothing earned by a newly trained private was substantially more than the six to eight shillings they could have made in unskilled civil labour.¹³

Although the military wages were not as attractive in the more prosperous regions of Kenya, in Ukambani these wages were considered to be very good because of lack of alternative means. Gradually, the KAR became a preferred occupation because of its relatively high pay rates and its prestige as a "manly" occupation as compared to working in settler farms. People who worked for the army gradually attracted greater respect in Machakos. As David Matheka notes,

I wanted to join the army so that I could marry the woman of my choice. I envied my friends in the army who were well-respected, had large amounts of disposable income and women preferred to marry them. Men who wore the army uniform and carried a gun were regarded as privileged members of the society. Many Akamba women would be attracted to the men with uniforms and good pay from the military service.¹⁴

As a result, KAR and the military became the most popular form of paid employment during World War II and only the strict recruiting quotas of the KAR would limit more Akamba men from being recruited there. As a consequence, the demand for the Akamba soldiers finally matched the supply as opposed to the case during the First World War when the Akamba men would forcefully be conscripted to the army. This can be discerned by the statistic given by Parsons,¹⁵ who has documented that in 1942, the Akamba made up 30 percent of the Kenyan complement of the KAR, 32 percent of the East African Army Education Corps, 43 percent of the East African Corps of Military Police, 46 percent of the East African Artillery, 46 percent of all signalers, and 13 percent of the non-combatant labour services. Further, according to the Kenyan Labour Department, nearly one-third of all employed Akamba males were in the military from 1943 to 1946. To put it another way, by 1944 one in three Akamba men between the ages of fifteen and forty-five were in the army. In comparison, the enlistment figures for the more populous Luo and Kikuyu ethnic groups were 18 percent and 6 percent respectively, while the percentage of the reputedly more martial Nandi and Kipsigis groups was only 10 percent.¹⁶

In fact the military labour became so popular that the supply was more than the demand. Some young men had to be sent back by the recruiting officers because they were not needed. One chief MutuawaNzuki contends that;

Some young men became frustrated as they went to the recruitment centers only to be told that they were not needed. They had seen how their age mates had been transformed by the military wages. They also wanted to wear the uniform and carry the gun and also become the centre of attention in their villages just like their counterparts. However, their dreams were shattered when they were told that they were not needed.¹⁷

In view of the above, it's discernible that the most lasting impact of the war was the extent to which it changed the Akamba attitude towards wage labour. The Akamba, who had always been blamed for not being as reliable as the kikuyu in terms of engaging in wage labour to the extent of being labelled 'lazy and indolent' became the most reliable during this time. This made the DC to comment that:

‘I think that in the whole country of Kenya there is no any other tribe which does the service for their King in the KAR as the Akamba tribe.’¹⁸

It is no wonder Parsons contends that the Akamba got one of the best war records of any East African community during World War II. They held 56 percent of the British Empire Medals earned by Kenyan Africans, 32 percent of all East Africa Force Badges, and 24 percent of all "Mention in Despatches."¹⁹ These acts of bravery impressed British officers. In addition, the East Africa civil liaison officer concluded that the Akamba showed more courage than any

¹³ Parsons, T. "Wakamba Warriors Are Soldiers of the Queen", 684.

¹⁴ OI. David Matheka at Syokimau on 14/11/2020.

¹⁵ Parsons, T. "The Wakamba Warriors Are Soldiers of the Queen", 683.

¹⁶ KNA/Kenya Labour Department, Manpower Bulletins, 1942-46.

¹⁷ OI. Chief MutuaNzuki at Makutano on 01/11/2020.

¹⁸ Machakos District Annual Report, 1939-45: KNA/DC/MKS 1/1/29.

¹⁹ Parsons, T. "The Wakamba Warriors are the Soldiers of the Queen", 685.

other Kenyan ethnic group during the fighting against the Japanese in Burma. Further, the Kenyan government's official report on the war agreed and labelled the Akamba the colony's best martial race in terms of courage and dependability.²⁰ As such, more and more Akamba got involved in military labour and relied on it more than livestock. Young men started being self-reliant and no longer needed their parents to pay their taxes or bride wealth as it had been the case in previous years. If anything, the reverse happened. The order men, whose livestock had been depleted, started relying on the young men who would send part of their wages to their ageing parents.

The study thus contends that this process of personal enrichment for young men had socio-economic repercussions. During the pre-colonial period, the Akamba marriage practices included the exchange of livestock as a form of bride wealth payment. In most cases, it was only older men who could afford such amount of livestock. Hence, the high value of livestock reinforced the authority of older men, as sons usually needed help from their fathers to acquire enough livestock to pay bride wealth. However, with most of the young men opting for wage labour, this balance was disrupted. This disruption sowed the seeds of a socio-economic revolution in Machakos because the young men now earned their own bride-wealth, thereby undermining the authority of their elders.

The study also maintains that World War II, through its economic and labour policies created a crisis in labour needed for livestock production. Civil and military recruitment accelerated the tendency to remove labour from the livestock economy and direct it towards outside employment. This interference with labour coupled with acute depletion of livestock and the occurrence of natural calamities, combined to generate the two major wartime famines in Machakos as analysed in the next section.

1.4 The Wartime Famines

As noted earlier, one significant aspect of the Second World War was the drain of manpower from the African reserves. This was demonstrated by the number of young men who joined the KAR and other forms of employment during this period. While conscription was the common method of recruitment in other areas of the colony, most Machakos Akamba joined the KAR voluntarily because the economic conditions in the Ukamba reserves had become so difficult. On the other hand, the army clothed, housed, and fed a man, and if he was careful, most of his earnings could be converted directly into saving. By the end of 1941, 12,000 young men from Machakos were in some form of military employment.²¹ The problem of outmigration of labor was so glaring that in 1941, the Agricultural Officer lamented that;

This district more than most others has been steadily bled for the military during the past three years of its most active, energetic and often intelligent elements of the male population. These men are missed from the community especially where mixed farming development is needed.²²

The emerging drain of manpower, coupled with natural calamities undermined food production which in turn led to two famines. *Nzaaya Makovo and Nzaaya Mwolyo*²³.

1.4.1. Nzaaya Makovo, 1939-41

Nzaaya Makovo literally meant "the famine of the boots." The phrase was used to exemplify the connection between the employment opportunities created by the war and the concurrent food shortage. This means that the outmigration of labour caused acute food shortages. Matheka underscores this by noting that;

"In a bid to escape famine, the Akamba may be said to have caused another food shortage by creating a shortage of agricultural labour in their reserve."²⁴

The *Makovo Famine* started in September 1939 and ended in April 1941. The famine was attributed to low rainfall in the 1938-40 period and an invasion of army worms and locusts in 1940. The most, affected areas were all the low-

²⁰Colony and Protectorate of Kenya, Native Affairs Department, Report on Native Affairs, 1939-1945. London.

²¹Machakos District Annual Report, 1941: KNA/DC/MKS 1/1/29.

²² KNA/DC/MKS 8/4/ Department of Agriculture Annual Report: 1943, 388.

²³Rocheleau, D. *et.al.* (1995). "Environment, Development, Crisis, and Crusade: Ukambani, Kenya, 1890-1990". *World Development*, Vol. 23, No. 6, 1041.

²⁴Matheka, R. "The Political Economy of Famine: Ecology and History in Machakos District during the Colonial Era". Master Thesis. Kenyatta University. (1992).

lying, eroded locations. These included Kaumoni, Kibauni, Kisau, Lower Mbooni, Nzau and Kikumbulyu. However, by the end of 1940, the whole district was experiencing famine.²⁵

To cope with the famine, those who were in the military remitted some of their earnings to the reserve, and the money was used to purchase food-stuffs. Nevertheless, the absence of such labour power hindered the development of the livestock industry in the reserve. O'Leary's²⁶ observes that the influx of military remittances in Kitui helped the people to survive famines in the 1940s. This equally applied to the whole ukambani region. The Akamba *askaris* sent home an average 12.67 shillings in family allotments per month.²⁷

Indeed, the remittances by the military servicemen alone exceeded the amount of money spent on food during the famine.²⁸ The Machakos famine also clearly reveals that there was no shortage of money in the reserves. This is according to Anderson and Throup who observe that in addition to paying £100,000 to the Kikuyu and the KituiAkamba to buy food, the Machakos Akamba spent a further £67,000 on 118,000 bags of food from the government.²⁹ From the foregoing, we can deduce that the people of Machakos were very dependent on this war remittances. No wonder the D.C. observed that;

"Had it not been for the military remittances, the Akamba would be a tribe of paupers"³⁰

Aside from the famine problem, there was also a problem of tax payment. Many Akamba could not meet their tax obligation due to famine. The livestock which the Akamba could have sold to pay taxes had either died due to lack of pasture or forcefully sold to the meat supply board for war purposes. Thus, many still relied on the military remittances made for food purchase to pay tax. For instance, in 1942, the Akamba spent £ 28,000 from the military remittances on poll tax.³¹ Apparently, the Akamba survived this difficult period by relying on money that the soldiers sent home in almost all aspects. As the District Commissioner confirmed;

Kamba civilians are so dependent on these remittances that the district would not be able to survive another famine without them.³²

Majority of the people who did not have any of their kins working in the army still relied on the remaining livestock for survival. On the basis of the hides sold in 1940, it was estimated that 17,000 head of cattle were slaughtered for food or died of starvation in the reserve. About the same number were sold or found their way to Kikuyuland and other adjoining districts to obtain food.³³ The D.C. recorded:

"People who had no ready cash sold cattle and goats in order to obtain money for buying maize, while many of these animals were slaughtered for food."³⁴

This is a clear demonstration of the society's reliance on livestock during food shortages. Despite the fact that livestock was causing soil erosion, vulnerability to recurrent droughts made every family to try as much as possible to have some stock.³⁵ The foregoing is an indication of the Akamba's overreliance on wage labour for food. Apart from the *Makovo Famine*, the Akamba would further suffer another more serious famine; the *Nzaaya Mwolyo* as discussed below.

1.4.2 Nzaaya Mwolyo, 1942-43

The greatest crises of the World War II were perhaps the food shortage of 1942-43. In ukambani, the famine was referred to as the Mwolyo Famine (*NzaaYa Mwolyo*). *Mwolyo* was a word which was coined in ukambani during this time to refer to relief food. The famine started in 1943 and ended in 1947. It was caused mainly by a general impoverished condition of the land and shortage of native man-power owing to extensive recruitment for military and

²⁵Machakos District Annual Report, 1940: KNA/DC/MKS 1/1/29, 2.

²⁶ O'Leary, M.F. *The KituiAkamba: Economic and Social Change in Semi-Arid Kenya* (Nairobi, 1984), 43.

²⁷Machakos District Annual Report, 1939-45: KNA/DC/MKS 1/1/29.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Anderson, D & Throup, D. "Africans and Agricultural Production in Colonial Kenya; The Myth of the War as a Watershed". *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 26, No. 4, *World War II and Africa*. (1985), 340.

³⁰Machakos District Annual Report, 1939-45: KNA/DC/MKS 1/1/29, 5.

³¹Machakos District Annual Report, 1939-45: KNA DC/MKS I / I /29, I-3 and 9.

³² Ibid, 5.

³³Matheka, *The Political Economy Of Famine*, 205.

³⁴Machakos District Annual Report, 1946-52: KNA/DC/MKS 1/1/30.

³⁵Tiffen, M., M. Mortimore and F. Gichuki. *More People, Less Erosion: Environmental Recovery in Kenya*. Chichester: Wiley.(1994).

civil production.³⁶In 1943, the Food Shortage Commission of Enquiry noted that the continual drain of manpower as a result of urban migration saw the production of food left to old men and the women folk. Another reason was the increased production of cash crops at the expense of food production.³⁷

In late 1943, the colonial government and the LNC started giving out relief food (mwolyo). However, as noted by Matheka,³⁸ the government subsidy for food was a fictitious claim. In reality, the people contributed livestock for the war effort and were supplied with food in return. Even then, evidence suggests that this arrangement amounted to unequal exchange imposed on the people by the colonial state. For example, the Agricultural Officer's report for 1945 stated;

We do at present levy a contribution for Livestock Control of 50,000 sheep/goats a year and any default is usually adjusted by threatening to reduce famine relief issue.³⁹

The benefits of this primitive accumulation to the colonial state were manifested by the administration's insistence on collecting the levy even after the Akamba had asked the government to be allowed to sell their livestock to their preferred buyers after which they would buy their own food. This became a source of conflict between the LNC and the administration, especially in 1946. The administration argued that through the levy, the Akamba supplied other parts of the colony with meat and received grain in return. But the Akamba were against this government-mediated exchange. They asked to be allowed to sell and buy in the open market. Indeed, members of the LNC cited instances when animals levied from the Akamba were sold to butchers in Nairobi and elsewhere at very high profits.⁴⁰ Despite vehement opposition, the government collected the levy until December 1946. The levy was not only a form of unequal exchange but punished the poorest households. This was caused by a condition which required every household to pay its livestock quota before it was allowed to buy imported food. This meant that the families that did not have livestock were forced to buy goats at high market prices in order to meet this obligation. In short, the government used the famine situation to acquire Akamba livestock at quasi-market prices, thereby impoverishing the society further.⁴¹

The conclusion that can be made here is that the severe food shortage during the Second World War was a grim but eloquent testimony to the outcome of the cumulative effect of discriminative economic policies. . This period was characterized by important changes which occurred in the social concepts of livestock production and its relations to economic security. The proliferation of opportunity for wage labour, together with the constant food shortages, produced the conviction that wage labour was the most reliable economic activity and certainly the most secure. Accordingly, livestock was no longer such a feasible measure of wealth as it had been in the past. By 1945 a large number of the people had come to feel that the only real economic security lay in some form of education and long term wage employment outside home. The period of WWII also witnessed a perpetuation of the earlier colonial prerogative relating to programmes of land reconditioning as discussed below.

1.5 Continuation in Land Reconditioning Programs

The Second World War instigated a partial suspension of the land reconditioning drive initiated in 1939. With large numbers of men out at work and most of the agricultural staff helping with the war effort, the colonial administration found it necessary to suspend large scale reconditioning until after the war. Only closure of denuded land to stock and cultivation was widely practiced during the war. However, due to continued land degradation, communal terracing was introduced in the reserve in 1942, but the exercise proved unpopular. The Government again turned its attention to the rehabilitation of the district under the auspices of a new "reconditioning" committee formed in 1944. However, the abortive attempt which the Government had made in 1938 to destock the district by compulsory sales now apparently caused the Akamba to view all reconditioning plans with keen distrust. At the same time, reports were circulated that newly rehabilitated land would be turned over to Europeans and large numbers of Akamba would be compelled to work on European farms as a measure of population relief and that severe cuts would be enforced in the number of livestock to which the Akamba were so attached.⁴²Hence, the Akamba became very suspicious of any reconditioning activity.

³⁶ KNA/DC/MKS 8/4, Department of Agriculture Annual Report, 1946, 408.

³⁷ Zeleza, T. "Kenya and the Second World War".

³⁸ Matheka, R. "The Political Economy of Famine".

³⁹ Machakos District Annual Report, 1939-45; KNA/DC/MKS 1/1/29.

⁴⁰ Machakos Local Native Council Minutes Book. 1945-47: KNA/DC/MKS 5/1/4, 96.

⁴¹ Ibid, 98.

⁴² De Wilde, J. C., *Experiences with Agricultural Development in Tropical Africa. Vol. 2: The Case Studies.* (Baltimore, 1967), 93.

Nonetheless, the agricultural officials focused with renewed vigour on reconditioning. It initiated the draining of *shambas*, terracing, and planting grasses. The DC reminded the people of the administration's intention not only to continue with the reconditioning work but also to intensify it.⁴³ He noted that;

As an acknowledgement of governmental generosity, the Kamba must not only cooperate in reconditioning programmes but also voluntarily reduce its surplus cattle and goats as well. The government is prepared to give them another chance.⁴⁴

Clearly, the administration was retreating from its firm position regarding destocking. Indeed, as Spencer⁴⁵ argues, one motivation for the decision to withdraw from compulsion was the necessity to institute immediately the reconditioning programme on an intensive scale during the rainy season. Destocking was now placed within the context of the larger soil conservation issue. Voluntary reduction of the livestock population and acceptance of proper agricultural and pastoral methods were crucial. Thus, officers were surveying the area, and the need for restoring confidence was clear.⁴⁶

The agricultural officers therefore actively encouraged the enclosure of grazing lands as well as the enclosure of homestead lands. They distributed sisal for demarcation of individual or family holdings in the drier, lower areas of the reserve, a task undertaken voluntarily by the more "well-to-do" Akamba. They believed that sisal, would protect land from damage by excessive numbers of livestock, and would eventually promote voluntary reduction of stock. As individual land holdings were fenced, officers conducted surveys, establishing ownership and noting soil features. After two years of serious effort to counter soil erosion, an agricultural officer reported that there were signs of progress.⁴⁷ Unfortunately, the advent of the *mwolyo* famine coincided with this reconditioning work. Hence, the colonial administration took advantage of the food shortage and ordered the people of Machakos to engage in reconditioning programmes in exchange for relief food. However, the Akamba felt that the amount of relief food that they were given did not correspond with the work they did. Hence, the use of relief food as a tool for enforcing terracing at a time when food scarcity in the colony had made the government the sole distributor of food-stuffs undoubtedly made people to hate the reconditioning drive. Similarly, closure of pasture land to stock without providing an alternative, caused a lot of resentment against the colonial establishment in Machakos. Consequently, any form of government interference in land-use was viewed with distaste. This had an adverse effect on the reconditioning programmes in Machakos. The District Agricultural Officer concluded that the anti-soil erosion campaign in the previous six years had been ineffective in Machakos. He noted that only the compulsory closure of grazing lands and individual fencing or ownership, had made any difference to the condition of the range.⁴⁸ This shows that the reconditioning programs in Machakos were not as productive as had been anticipated. Munro has argued that the reconditioning programmes did very little to bring positive development in Machakos as they led to land enclosing hence, promoting individualism.⁴⁹ The spread of individualism at the expense of communal use triggered land shortage among many people.⁵⁰ For example, in 1944, about 13 per cent of the population in Machakos District was landless.⁵¹ Furthermore, in 1945, overpopulation in Machakos was estimated at 200,000 people.⁵²

In a nutshell, the so called 'development programs' had led to 'underdevelopment' in Machakos. On the one hand, neglect of the livestock sector and lack of land for expansion had led to over grazing in the Machakos reserve. On the other hand, rural capitalism which encouraged individualism through the introduction of fencing had created a landless class which was previously dependent on livestock and crop production. Therefore, there is no doubt that the World War II period was the climax of 'The Machakos Problem'. By 1945, there was no more virgin land in the reserve and opportunities for pastoral pursuits in the reserve had come to an end. The consequence was over-cultivation and over-grazing, which resulted in a dwindling pastoral economy.

⁴³ KNA/ DC/MKS.10B/15/1: Points for Baraza with Kamba Policy," 2 December 1939.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Leon Spencer, "Notes on the Kamba Destocking Controversy of 1938," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 5-4. 1972, 630.

⁴⁶ KNA/DC/MKS. 10B/15/1. S. H. La Fontaine to Provincial Commissioner, Nyeri, 2 December 1938.

⁴⁷ Leon Spencer, "Notes on the Kamba Destocking Controversy of 1938", 631.

⁴⁸ Machakos District Annual Report, 1946-52: KNA/DC/MKS 1/1/30.

⁴⁹ J.F. Munro, *Colonial Rule and the Akamba: Social Change in the Kenya Highlands 1889-1939*. (London, 1975)

⁵⁰ Throup, D.W. *Economic and Social Origins of Mau Mau*. Nairobi: Heinemann. 1988.

⁵¹ KNA/DC/MKS/1/58, 70.

⁵² Thurston, A. *Smallholder Agriculture in Colonial Kenya: The Official Mind of the Swynnerton Plan* (Cambridge, 1987), 21.

1.6 The Shift to Cash Crop Production

The outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 hindered the promotion of cash crop production in Machakos. Most of the agricultural staff was mobilized for the war effort. Thus, the colonial government abandoned the quest for agricultural development in favour of campaigns to recruit Akamba men, both voluntarily and under coercion, into the army and to increase wartime production. However, the production of grain crops were hindered by severe food shortages and famines as mentioned earlier.⁵³

Nonetheless, despite the failure of the colonial state to assist to the Akamba agriculture, some areas of the reserve recorded some commendable progress. For example, in the areas around Kangundo-Matungulu region, some farmers began using manure to improve the productivity of their farms and also paddocked their land in which they also started growing fodder crops. Other farmers also began growing well-paying Indian crops such as Bengal gram and Coriander which had been introduced by the missionaries and Asian traders. Coriander was now recognized as the main district export in 1943. It was seen an important cash crop in the drier areas in the 1940s.⁵⁴ Other Asian vegetables were also introduced in the same way

. The traders also gave the farmers seeds and then fixed the price for the crop products. This change from maize monoculture to other cash crops can possibly be explained by two factors. First, a 200-lb bag of Bengal gram went for Kshs 100 in 1944 as compared to about Kshs 10 for the 1 bag of African brown maize.⁵⁵ Second, the depletion of soil fertility by maize, and the consequent need to use manure to restore fertility, obviously forced farmers to grow more cash fetching crops in order to compensate for the extra effort. Thus, at the height of the famine in 1944, the two locations intensified their cash crop production as they sold 2,980 bags of Bengal gram.⁵⁶

Similarly, there was a sharp rise in the production of fruits and vegetables. In Iveti and Makindu for instance, a considerable varieties of vegetables and fruits were grown. Despite the lack of reliable rainfall, these crops were put under irrigation. No wonder then that Iveti became the main supplier of straw-berries to Nairobi and the Kenya Orchard's fruit factory at Machakos. It also exported straw-berries to Eldoret. Aside from that, tomatoes, carrots, onions, guavas, paw paws, okra and chillies were exported daily from Machakos and Makindu in very large quantities.⁵⁷ Indeed, Matungulu Vegetable Company got a contract to supply fruits and vegetables to the army base at Mackinnon Road.⁵⁸

In sum, the study argues that despite the lack of colonial state's support, commercial agriculture can be said to have expanded in Machakos during the war period. All this development was at the detriment of the livestock economy. Most of the Machakos Akamba shifted all their attention to the new venture while abandoning livestock production. Some hitherto renowned livestock keepers were now showing more interest in the production of cash crops than in the livestock sector. There was a growing vigour in economic diversification with special attention to more profitable ventures, especially cash crop production which was seen as a relatively more economically rewarding enterprise.

1.7. Conclusion

The paper set out to analyze the impact of World War II on the livestock economy in Machakos. It has demonstrated that the outbreak of the Second World War had contradictory effects on the Akamba economy. One of the most important changes during the war period was the fact that a wage-earning class had taken root. It was a class that depended entirely on wage earning for everyday sustenance. This saw the declining role of the livestock economy. People began to have a feeling that they could no longer rely on livestock for survival. The economic changes brought on by this new wealthy working class contributed to the further erosion of established societal norms. Young, experienced, and wealthy ex-servicemen saw little reason to respect the elders as they no longer depended on them to establish themselves socially and economically. Wage labour, rather than age or tradition, became one of the main avenues to social status in post-war Machakos.

⁵³ Rocheleau, D. *et.al.* "Environment, Development, Crisis, and Crusade.", 1042.

⁵⁴ Peberdy, J. "Notes on Some Economic Aspects of Machakos District". *Property Rights. Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 8, (1961).

⁵⁵ Department of Agriculture Annual Report. 1941-47: KNA/DC/MKS 8/4, 317.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ R. Matheka. "The Political Economy of Famine", 204.

⁵⁸ KNA/DC/MKS 8/4. Department of Agriculture: Annual Report. 1941-47, 263.

Secondly, the wage income was at the expense of the subsistence labour in Machakos. On the whole, production in the reserve deteriorated due to lack of labour. The out migration of the Machakos Akamba to seek for wage labour may be said to have caused the decline of livestock sector in Machakos as it created the shortage of labour required for production. This led to the two wartime famines namely *Makovo* and *Mwolyo*.

Moreover, the land reconditioning programmes, coupled with cash crop production encouraged the use of sisal to enclose land holdings. This led to individualism in land use. This in turn created a landless class. Many people in Machakos had nowhere to graze their livestock. The repercussion was that many people decided to abandon livestock keeping to venture in other more viable enterprises which did not require a lot of land. Clearly, the once cherished livestock industry in Machakos was gradually coming to a halt.

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