

THE LAND QUESTION : KIAMBU COUNTY

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Land Question will define County Leadership

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This is why a major part of Kiambu County's social-economic and political terrain is defined by its land question. Actors from Kiambu who were lucky to join the ranks of the executive or political class in the first independent government certainly had their eyes trained on the land till then held by the departing colonial settlers. Through a combination of factors, most of the white

settler farms ended up in the hands of the new ruling and political class. Then the Company and Cooperative groups that emerged soon after independence began to bring together groups of landless people to buy some of the land from the departing settlers.

That's why the discussion of land in Kiambu goes hand in hand with the politics of big land buying companies such as Nyakinyua and Mboi-Kamiti among others. And from Gatuanyaga bordering Kitui, through Kiambaa and Limuru to Lari bordering Naivasha, one meets several big farms supporting flourishing plantations of pineapples, coffee, tea, horticulture or diary production. But the farms stand prominently among many small scale holder farms while in some places, they neighbor fairly poor landless people. Most of these supply manual labour to the big farms. This inequality in landholding and wealth defines one of the most fundamental social-economic challenges that the leadership of the Kiambu County must confront. To some extent, it fuels insecurity in parts of the County.

Urban expansion an new residential estates a threat to agricultural land

Kiambu County also faces another major land challenge defined by the rapid expansion of the Nairobi's peri-urban zone towards Ruiru, Kiambu, Ruaka and Kikuyu. Also, the urban centers of Kikuyu, Limuru, Kiambu, Ruiru and Thika have also been rapidly expanding following heavy residential and commercial needs. Unfortunately, all these towns are surrounded by rich agricultural land. Given the higher economic returns derived from the conversion of such agricultural land, many owners have sought change of user and large tracts of such land have been increasingly lost from Kiambu's agricultural stock. Good examples are parts of the upcoming Thindigua Estate along Kiambu Road formerly under coffee and parts of the current Evergreen and Runda Estate. It is perhaps only a matter of time before we lose the plush coffee farms next to Kiambu town as well.

Kidfarmaco Estate in Kikuyu is another example. Others are Githunguri Ranch and the Nyakinyua farms next to Ruiru which are all now under residential and commercial use. The new Tatu City next to Ruiru will claim more agricultural land.

Thika Landless and the neighbouring residential estates also sit on former agricultural land that

earlier fed Thika's urban ecosystem.

While these conversions spell higher economic returns, the leadership of the new County will have to do some good cost-benefit analysis to determine the net effect of these conversions to food security to the County and Country.

Dry parts call for affirmative irrigation programmes

The Western fringes of Kikuyu and Limuru, defined by the arid parts of Ndeiya and Karai, will need special attention to promote the livelihoods of citizens out there. Low amounts of rainfall will continuously undermine the efforts of people in Ndeiya and Karai. The County government must therefore examine how to provide sufficient water through irrigation or boreholes to support production and livelihoods in the zone.

In general, population increase in the County has seen most agricultural parcels subjected to subdivision to sizes only suitable for residential use. This too leads to diminishing agricultural returns in the County and poses a major threat unless well addressed.

Kiambu County will therefore need to quickly establish a strong land administration system to ensure that some of the above challenges are quickly addressed.

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