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THE INTRODUCTION OF COFFEE IN
GUSILAND, KENYA, 1933-1942

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ABSTRACT

This paper is part of a broader study of the socio-economic history of arabica coffee growing in Gusiiland from 1933 to 1950. Using the contemporary correspondence and statements of colonial officials and interviews with the growers, the methods of extension, the processing and marketing of the crops and the financing of the industry are discussed.

In addition, the factors are assessed which prevented greater adoption of coffee by Gusiil farmers and greater expansion of production. At first the farmers were reluctant to plant coffee because they were suspicious of government's motives. Those who did plant were primarily interested in earning a greater income. By 1938, many of the farmers were willing to grow coffee, but expansion was halted by government's policy of limiting coffee production by Kenya Africans.

INTRODUCTION

The economic history of Kenya during the colonial period is characterised by emphasis on the European farming sector, particularly prior to the 1950s. The European farmers were the focus of infrastructure development, extension services, loans and research, and certain cash crops, such as sisal, tea, pyrethrum and for a long time arabica coffee, were reserved exclusively for them.

It was difficult for the colonial government in Kenya to justify prohibiting Africans, not by law but in practise, from growing coffee, because the governments of Uganda and Tanganyika Territories actively encouraged the indigenous people to grow coffee in suitable areas. Before 1933, the issue of African coffee growing was periodically raised by commissions and other groups, but effective opposition was expressed by the settlers and some of the government officials. In 1933, due to pressure from the British Colonial Office, the Kenya administration initiated experiments with African coffee growing in parts of Meru, Embu and Kisii. The early years of coffee growing in Gusiiland, referred to as Kisii by the Europeans, is the subject of this study.

COFFEE GROWING INTRODUCED ON DESIGNATED BLOCK FARMS

In the spring of 1933, the Senior Coffee Officer of the colonial administration toured the Kisii highlands and approved of certain areas for the growing of arabica coffee. From these areas the District Agricultural Officer designated three blocks of land for coffee growing where African farmers who wished to plant coffee could have their own plots. Two of the blocks were in Nyaribari location, one at Neunsia near Chief Musa Nyandusi's home and the other a few miles away at Nyankururu. The third block was in Bassi location at Mogunga near the Majoge locational boundary.

The purpose of allowing coffee to be grown only in designated blocks was to facilitate supervision by government officers.¹ For this reason each block was located near a main road. However, this system presented a serious obstacle to farmers who would be required to meet a high standard of husbandry on a plot often at some distance from their homes.

Meetings were held to encourage coffee growing in the area of each block. The District Commissioner, the District Agricultural Officer and the Senior Agricultural Instructor, who had been sent to the district in 1934 to help the Agricultural Officer with the coffee-growing experiment, took part in the campaign, and in Nyaribari Chief Musa also appealed to farmers to grow coffee on the block farm. Farmers were told that licenses and seedlings would be provided free by the Local Native Council, and that they could expect cash profits from coffee growing, but they were also warned that there were government regulations concerning coffee growing by Africans and they would be fined if they did not follow the proper husbandry practises.²

1. Letter from Kisii Agricultural Officer to District Commissioner, April 15, 1936 (KNA: Agric. Kisumu Coff/1). Substantiated by oral interview with Zedekiah Oyando, Maseno area, Siaya District, July 23, 1973.

2. Oral interview with Okari Okonge, Ibacho area, Nyaribari Masaba, February 19, 1971.

Initially the names of 100 prospective coffee growers were collected for the Mogunga block farm, but at subsequent meetings in late December 1933, it was discovered that these farmers thought they were to work for wages on a government coffee planting scheme. When a new list was made, only eleven names were collected. More names were added at a meeting in March 1934, but, although by April more than 85 persons were reported to be preparing land on the Mogunga block farm, less than 20 eventually became coffee growers.³ The numbers of coffee growers on the other two block farms were equally small.

Why were so few of the Gusii farmers willing to start growing coffee? The reason most often given was that, since coffee was a European crop, the farmers feared that if they began growing it successfully the Europeans would take their land, just as they had taken the land of other Africans in Kenya. Other reasons mentioned less frequently were that people did not realise the potential financial value of coffee, or that coffee was a difficult crop to care for and the farmers were aware of the strict government regulations concerning proper husbandry.

Since most of the Gusii were unwilling to start growing coffee at this early stage, the motives of those who did begin growing coffee are particularly interesting. One informant remembered that since so few volunteered for the Mogunga block farm, the District Commissioner said that government employees should be the first to plant.⁴ Evidently he did not impose this decision forcibly, however, since not all the local government workers complied. Another informant who was one of the pioneer growers at Mogunga said that he and a few other persons were told to grow coffee and assigned plots by their Chief. Those told to grow coffee did not have to contribute much labour at the early stages because most of the work, such as the preparation of the land and planting of seedlings, was done by agricultural department labourers. However, some of these persons who did not care for their fields were later prosecuted.⁵ A number of farmers at Mogunga abandoned their plots or sold them, a phenomenon much rarer on the other block farms. It appears then that three categories of farmers planted at Mogunga: the volunteers, those persuaded to do so since they worked for the government and those designated by the Chief.

3. Letter from Kisii Agricultural Officer to District Commissioner, January 19, 1934 (KNA: PC NZA AGR 1/2/9); Monthly Crop Reports, S.K., March and April 1934 (KNA: PC NZA AGR 3/2/4); and List of Coffee Growers, South Kavirondo, November 30, 1937 (KNA: Agric. Kisumu Coff/1).

4. Oral Interview with Mikael Mbera, Omoringambo area, Majoge Chache, January 17, 1971.

5. Oral interview with John Oseko, Mogunga area, Bassi, June 14, 1973.

Government Encouragement and Limited Expansion

From the nursery established at Kisii town during 1933, the first seedlings were planted on Chief Musa's plot at Neunsia in March and April 1934. Slightly more than three-and-a-half acres were planted in order to "stimulate interest in coffee growing".⁶ The following month four acres were planted in coffee at Mogunga on Chief Alexis's plot, and later in the year an additional five acres were planted by Chief Musa. On the other fields, the Local Native Council's ox-plough was hired to prepare the land, the boundaries of plots were marked, holes were dug and temporary shade trees planted.

In July 1934, a European plantation inspector from Sotik, which was a European settlement area adjacent to the Gusii, gave demonstrations to the Gusii farmers on how to plant coffee. Only 22 farmers attended, apparently since only those already signed up to plant coffee were invited. Almost all the designated coffee growers at the two Nyaribari block farms attended, but only four attended at Mogunga, another indication that there was less interest in coffee growing in that area.⁷

During the same summer a group of Local Native Council members and other leaders from South Kavirondo toured parts of Uganda. The visit was intended to stimulate interest in development projects for the district, including coffee growing. The District Commissioner explained that those chosen to tour Uganda:

Are capable of explaining to their people the objectives which they should strive to reach and are sufficiently intelligent and educated to understand the ways and means by which such objectives had been reached elsewhere. They will see in Uganda districts in various stages of development and should obtain much useful information in regard to cotton, coffee, bee wax and general working of the native administration.⁸

In 1935 the first coffee was planted at Nyankururu and additional coffee was planted at Mogunga and Neunsia. In addition, a number of plants on Chief Musa's plot were replaced. Seedlings were carried to the three locations from the nursery at Kisii on the heads of the labourers, but preparations were made for the establishment of nurseries near the three block farms. By the end of 1935, 38.21 acres were planted in coffee with

6. Letter from Kisii Agricultural Officer to Deputy Director of Plant Industries in the Department of Agriculture, July 18, 1934 (KNA: Agric. Kisumu Coff/1).

7. Letter from Nyanza Agricultural Officer to Kisii Agricultural Officer, June 27, 1934 (KNA: PC NZA AGR 1/2/9); and letter from the Kisii Agricultural Officer to the Nyanza Senior Agricultural Officer, September 1, 1934 (KNA: Agric. Kisumu Coff/1).

8. Intelligence Report for May 1934, S.K. (KNA: Agric. Kisumu A/Coff/1/1).

an additional 7.60 acres in the Kisii nursery, but there were still less than twenty growers.⁹

In 1936, the District Commissioner and the Agricultural Officer decided to designate a new coffee growing area in Kitutu location where, according to the Agricultural Officer, the people were keener to grow coffee. Chief Aoga and the Senior Agricultural Instructor selected a twenty-acre site in the Murumba area which had been used as communal pasture, and it was later approved by the Senior Coffee Officer. A nursery was established and planting took place a year later. During this time additional areas in Kitutu with willing growers were identified and received the approval of the Senior Coffee Officer.

In December 1936, the district Chiefs including Chief Aoga of Kitutu and Chief Musa of Nyaribari, together with those of Central Kavirondo, toured Uganda. They visited a big coffee factory, local pulping stations, nurseries and several small African-owned coffee plantations. At the Bugusege Coffee Experimental Station they also saw pruning and mulching experiments. Their observations were brought back to their people and influenced the future structure and organisation of the Gusii coffee industry.¹⁰

COFFEE GROWING EXPANDED ON THE FARMERS' OWN LAND

Additional planting was slow, and officers attributed this to the block system which by mid-1936 was labelled a failure. Farmers found it difficult to plant on the block farms, and many of those who did lived too far away from their coffee fields to care for them properly. Of the eleven growers at Mogunga, for example, only three lived within two miles of their coffee plots. The Agricultural Officer admitted that, "too much thought was given to having the coffee accessible easily for officers to visit it and too little thought was given to the accessibility for the grower himself".¹¹ As early as mid-1935, the Director of Agriculture explained to the Colonial Secretary that, "natives are always suspicious of ulterior motives on the part of Government in regard to their land. Such suspicions are doubled when the crop can only be grown in small defined areas and under severe restrictions".¹²

9. Arabica Coffee Quarterly Report for October-December 1935, S.K. (KNA: Agric. Kisumu A/Coff/1/1); and letter from Kisii Agricultural Officer to Nyanza Agricultural Officer, December 16, 1935 (KNA: Agric. Kisumu A/Coff/1/1).

10. "Report on Chiefs' Tour to Uganda," from Kisii Agricultural Officer to Nyanza Agricultural Officer, December 21, 1936 (KNA: PC NZA 4/5/8); and oral interview with ex-chief Aoga, Marani area, Kitutu West, June 22, 1973.

11. Letter from Kisii Agricultural Officer to Nyanza Agricultural Officer, September 12, 1936 (KNA: Agric. Kisumu Coff/1).

12. Letter from Director of Agriculture to Colonial Secretary, June 20, 1935 (KNA: Agric. Kisumu Coff/1).

However, The inconvenience of the block system was barrier enough even for those who were not suspicious of government motives. For example, a Mr. Mbera was serving on the Court of Appeals when the block farm was initiated at Mogunga, five miles from his home. He and his wife and son moved to within a mile of the farm and cultivated a plot using family labour, but when his son died he and his wife moved back to their original home in a state of grief. He was threatened with arrest for neglecting his plot and made to pay a fine. The District Commissioner at Kisii advised him to sell his coffee trees, but when he returned to Mogunga he found that his trees had been burned in a bush fire.¹³ Almost all of those who eventually received warnings or were prosecuted for neglecting their coffee trees had planted on the block farms.

Because of these problems, in 1936 and 1937 the colonial administration decided to expand coffee growing under a neighborhood concentration system where farmers could plant coffee on their own land, but in clusters of neighboring farms rather than scattered over a large area to facilitate supervision. Evidently Chief Aoga had been advocating this system in his district. In fact, it was not strictly adhered to; by the end of 1937 four clusters of coffee growers consisted of only two farmers each, and one person was allowed to grow coffee on his farm approximately three miles away from his nearest coffee growing neighbour.¹⁴

The new system did stimulate the adoption process. It was initiated in Kitutu during the last part of 1936 and extended to the other areas a year later. By the end of 1937, there were 95 growers in the district with a total of 78.50 acres under coffee,¹⁵ and the Agriculture Officer observed, "It is no longer a question of persuading people to plant, but of selecting the most suitable applicants and allowing them to plant a small area only".¹⁶

13. Oral interview with Mikael Mbera, cited above.

14. See List of Coffee Growers, cited above.

15. Arabica Coffee Report, Fourth Quarter 1937, S.K. (KNA: Agric. Kisumu A/Coff/1/1).

16. Colony and Protectorate of Kenya, Native Affairs Department, Annual Report 1937, London, H.M.S.O., 1939, p. 135.

When coffee was only allowed on the block farms a farmer living relatively near a block had only to submit his name to be accepted as a grower. After the neighbourhood concentration system was established, it still seems that any farmer could plant coffee as long as he lived in a gazetted location.¹⁷ Although the land of a prospective grower had to be inspected for its suitability, an appropriate site was usually found.¹⁸

The pioneer growers who planted on the Mogunga block farm have already been described, but in the other areas the early growers are not broken down between those who planted on the block farms and those who planted later on their own land. The most frequent reason these farmers gave for starting to grow coffee was the desire to increase their cash income. They were also strongly encouraged by Chief Musa and Chief Aoga. Often they were people who for one reason or another were already familiar with coffee growing and its potential for profit making. One person recalled being impressed by Mr. Gethin's coffee plantation¹⁹, while several others mentioned working on European coffee plantations or seeing coffee growing when they were working outside the district.²⁰ Another pioneer grower explained:

I had lived in Uganda where I was able to witness coffee being grown by the Bagandans.... I had also heard of the [Africans] in Tanganyika and the progress they had made as a result of coffee growing. As a result, when coffee was first allowed to be grown by Africans, I wasted no time in seeing that I planted it. Indeed, I had been anxious to do so for a long time.²¹

Another early adopter was particularly motivated because when he returned from a stay in prison most of the land and all of the animals belonging to his family had been taken. He had heard how much money was being made growing coffee in Kiambu, so he and his father and brother all volunteered.²²

17. According to an oral interview with Onyiego Ongorwa, Jogoo area, Kitutu Central, June 20, 1973, this meant male farmer. Widows in charge of farms were not allowed to grow coffee until the 1950s.

18. Oral interview with M.M. Otworu, Kemera area, Kitutu Central, February 22, 1971.

19. Oral interview with Nyamari Nyatome, Keumbu area, Nyaribari Chache, May 9, 1973.

20. For example, Bosire Osoro, Kereri area, Kitutu Central, interviewed on May 18, 1973; Omabia Omabira, Marani area, Kitutu West, interviewed on May 16, 1973; and Magani Okoba, Mogoroka area, Kitutu Central, interviewed on February 25, 1971.

21. Oral interview with Kasimir Orwenyo, Marani area, Kitutu West, May 17, 1973.

22. Oral interview with Marita Ongwora, Onsungus area, Kitutu West, March 8, 1971.

Those who planted coffee first were also frequently less mistrustful of government than the other local farmers. As one person put it, "People like myself who worked for the government decided to plant and show others that this was not true [the rumour about land being taken] about the Europeans".²³ Another grower who was a sub-headman at the time explained that, "We were government people, so we were not afraid. We were sure that the government would not take the land."²⁴

One of the pioneer growers gave a very good description of the early adopters which was substantiated by interviews with others: "Those of us who first planted coffee had already learned to read and write. At the same time, we had already been converted to Christianity and, as such, we were slightly different from the majority of our people."²⁵

An interesting question is why were the early coffee growers so eager to earn cash. Many of those interviewed mentioned needing money to pay school fees, but this seems to be an anachronistic explanation since the schools at that time do not appear to have charged fees. Several others mentioned needing money to buy cattle to be used in payment of bridewealth. For example, one early grower mentioned having no uterine sister, so that no bridewealth cattle would accrue to his maternal homestead. He was forced to look for another way to obtain cattle and thus began growing coffee. He was able to buy the twelve cows and twelve goats necessary to marry his first wife with profits from coffee growing, and later he used further coffee earnings to marry a second wife.²⁶ Others already had one wife, but saw coffee growing as a means to acquire a second one.

23. Oral interview with Nyankundi, Tinga area, Kitutu East, February 23, 1971.

24. Oral interview with Mariera Angwenyi, Onsungus area, Kitutu West, March 8, 1971.

25. Oral interview with Mariko Nyansingo, Nyaguta area, Nyaribari Chache, June 21, 1973.

26. Oral interview with Nyamari Nyatome, cited above.

EXTENSION SERVICE

During the last half of 1933, the Acting Director of Agriculture told the District Commissioner that the District Agricultural Officer, Mr. Gaddum, who had some experience with coffee, would be able to oversee local coffee production except at the time of transplanting and pruning when an expert would be needed.²⁷ However, no expert was available for the initial planting out from the nurseries in 1934, and in fact Mr. Gaddum was almost transferred from the district at the critical time. To assist in the work with coffee, an African Senior Agricultural Instructor, Mr. Zedekia Oyondo, was posted to the district in 1934. He had one year of field experience and five years of training, two at Scott Agricultural Laboratory when he specialised in coffee. Mr. Oyondo was primarily responsible for managing the coffee nursery on the Local Native Council seed farm.²⁸

Local persons were hired as coffee inspectors, coffee field staff, coffee nursery labourers and eventually pulping station workers, their salaries paid by the Local Native Council. In the early years of the industry due to the small number of growers and the experimental nature of the project, each grower received a remarkably high level of staff supervision, advice and assistance. In 1935, the coffee development staff numbered between eleven and twenty-two, and by January 1936, twenty-three were employed, though a number of these were probably labourers in the coffee nursery.²⁹ As of December 1935, this staff assisted only fifteen growers, with another sixteen preparing their land.³⁰

27. Letter from District Commissioner to Deputy Director of Plant Industries in the Department of Agriculture, March 14, 1934; and letter from Nyanza Agricultural Officer to Deputy Director of Plant Industries, March 19, 1934 (KNA: PC NZA Agr 1/2/9).

28. Oral interview with Zedekiah Oyondo, cited above.

29. Monthly Reports, S.K., June 1935 to January 1936 (KNA: Agric. Kisumu REPT/4).

30. Letter from Kisii Agricultural Officer to Nyanza Agricultural Officer, December 16, 1935 (KNA: Agric. Kisumu A/Coff/1.1).

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By mid-1937, five Native Coffee Inspectors had been appointed. One of them, Mr. Gabriel Nyamweya, explained his background and training for the position:

When I left teaching I went to Chief Musa for a job. He gave me a letter to take to Oyando who interviewed me. After a successful interview, I was sent to Kabete where I stayed for six months. I was taught how to plant coffee, spray DDT, pick berries and weed. Also I was taught how to wash the coffee after picking.³¹

In addition, he learned preventative soil erosion techniques.

The five Coffee Inspectors, as well as the other field staff, assisted with preparing the land and planting properly spaced shade trees and coffee seedlings. They taught the farmers techniques for mulching, pruning and preventing soil erosion, and the Inspectors examined the fields for disease and standards of husbandry. The supervision and instruction consisted of demonstrations and actual participation in the labour.

In mid-1939, the coffee field staff was reorganised so that each Coffee Inspector became responsible for all the work in his designated area, including field work, nurseries and pulping stations, and assumed direct control of the field staff. Measures were taken, such as abolishing the pruning squad, to reduce the actual labour done by the field staff on the coffee plots, but the staff remained responsible for spraying the trees to control diseases and pests.³²

Coffee Varieties and Diseases

As part of the experiment with African coffee growing, three varieties of arabica coffee, Kent's, Gethin's and Blue Mountain, were tested for their suitability to the local environment and resistance to disease. Initially, the Agricultural Officer suggested planting one variety on each of the three block farms, but the Senior Coffee Officer advised that Blue Mountain be planted most widely and only smaller trials be conducted with the other two

31. Oral interview with Gabriel Nyamweya, Keumbu area, Nyaribari Chache, March 5, 1971.

32. Quarterly Report, S.K., July 1939 (KNA: Agric. Kisumu REPT/4/1).

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varieties, because Blue Mountain was known to be resistant to hemeleia (a leaf disease) and appeared to be resistant to Coffee Berry Disease. However, during the first two years only Gethin's and Kent's varieties were available.³³

By spring 1936, 21.46 acres of Kent's variety had been planted at Neunsia and Nyankururu, but it had proved unsuitable for local conditions. At Mogunga, 17.75 acres of Gethin's had been planted. That fall, Blue Mountain was planted in the nursery, and when planting began at Kitutu in 1937, Blue Mountain was used. Future plantings were almost entirely of Blue Mountain, and in some cases fields of Kent's and Gethin's were uprooted and replanted with Blue Mountain.³⁴

An outbreak of hemeleia occurred in 1937 in the Mogunga area and on Chief Musa's plot, but it was brought under control by spraying. The following year a form of Coffee Berry Disease attacked fields planted in Kent's variety on Chief Musa's plot, spreading rapidly at Neunsia and Nyankururu. However, the Blue Mountain plants in the same areas proved highly resistant to the attack. By April 1939, the Agricultural Officer reported that four acres had been uprooted because of Coffee Berry Disease, and by August the increase in the disease had caused growers at Nyankururu "to become dis-spirited". Again in 1940, Coffee Berry Disease attacked fields planted in Kent's variety. Minor outbreaks of various coffee diseases and pests also occurred during this period, but they were controlled by the spraying carried out by the coffee field staff.³⁵

33. Letter from Senior Coffee Officer to Nyanza Agricultural Officer, February 14, 1935; and letter from Senior Coffee Officer to Deputy Director of Plant Industries, July 2, 1936 (KNA: Agric. Kisumu Coff/1).

34. Arabica Coffee Quarterly Report, S.K., April - June 1936, July - September 1936 and Second Quarter 1937 (KNA: Agric. Kisumu A/Coff/1/1).

35. Arabica Coffee Quarterly Report, S.K., Fourth Quarter 1937 (KNA: Agric. Kisumu A/Coff/1/1); Monthly Report for August 1938 (KNA: Agric. Kisumu A/REPT/4); Quarterly Reports, S.K., April and August 1939 (KNA: Agric. Kisumu Rept/4); and Arabica Coffee Quarterly Report, S.K., Third Quarter 1940 (KNA: Agric. Kisumu A/Coff/1/1).

In late 1941, Blue Mountain plantings revealed a disease which was identified at Scott Agricultural Laboratory as brown blight, which did not normally attack Blue Mountain coffee. The samples were taken from trees planted at an altitude of about 6,500 feet, so eventually a limit was set on the altitude at which coffee could be planted.³⁶

PROCESSING THE COFFEE

By 1937, the first coffee trees were producing berries, and it had to be decided whether the berries would be dried by the individual owners and sold as mbuni or pulped and sold as parchment. The Senior Agricultural Officer and the Provincial Commissioner of Nyanza favoured the pulping method for Kisii on the grounds that the wet climate would probably endanger mbuni production. They recommended that the pulping system be tried at Neunsia and mbuni production be experimented with at the same time in the other areas.³⁷ In fact, pulping stations were soon erected in several coffee growing areas, and the question of mbuni production was never raised again.

At Neunsia the first fly picking of coffee from Chief Musa's fields had to be hand pulped, but the pulping station was ready to process the main harvest. According to reports the station was pulping about 500 pounds of cherry a day for five growers.³⁸ A station was completed at Mogunga early in 1938, by midyear one was ready at Kisii town and another began operation at Nyankururu in late 1938. The following year two stations opened in Kitutu, at Murumba and at Marani, and in 1942 a pulper was temporarily installed at Nyankegogi and a site selected for a station at Gesarara. Meanwhile, new semi-rotary pumps were installed in place of hand operated machines in the older stations at Neunsia and Mogunga. Thus by the end of 1942, seven pulping stations were operating in Gusiiland.

36. Letter from Kisii Assistant Agricultural Officer to Agricultural Officer and Experimentalist, Scott Agricultural Laboratory, December 2, 1941; and letter from Plant Pathologist, Scott Agricultural Laboratory, to Kisii Assistant Agricultural Officer, December 11, 1941 (KNA: Agric. Kisumu A/Coff/3).

37. Letter from Nyanza Provincial Commissioner to District Commissioner, April 7, 1937 (KNA: Agric. Kisumu Coff/1).

38. Monthly Report, S.K., October 1937 (KNA: Agric. Kisumu REPT/4).

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Long before the first pulping station was built, the questions were raised of who should manage the stations and who should finance them. Initially the Provincial Agricultural Officer felt that the stations should "be looked after by a European",³⁹ but in August 1936 the District Agricultural Officer advised that "some really reliable and fully experienced Natives [be employed] to supervise the pulping and drying of coffee at the pulping stations".⁴⁰ In fact, the pulping stations were always managed by Africans, and in 1939 their operations were put under the control of the African Coffee Inspectors.

The Agricultural Officer had suggested that the coffee pulping stations be paid for by the Local Native Council which would be reimbursed by charges made to the growers. When the question of African coffee growing was first discussed by colonial officers, it was stipulated that government would not assist in financing local industries but Local Native Council funds could be made available for this purpose. Up until 1943 when a reorganisation took place, the Local Native Council did indeed pay for the annual licenses for growers until their coffee came into bearing, the building of pulping stations, the purchase of pulping machines and services including the extension staff. A small part of this expenditure was recovered through a cess imposed on the coffee pulped. In 1938 the Provincial Commissioner maintained that these responsibilities should eventually be borne by an association of coffee growers, but the Local Native Council should continue to finance such projects as the erection of pulping stations until an association was formed.

At first the Mogunga station pulped all the growers' coffee berries together, but later each grower's coffee was processed separately at Mogunga and Nyaribari so that each could be paid according to the quality of his cherries. By mid-1938 this practise revealed poor results in fermentation, so that, in line with a suggestion from the experimentalist at Scott Agricultural Laboratory, the coffee was all processed together and the farmers paid for each debe (tin) of cherry received at the factory and a further percentage paid out after the sale of the crop. To ensure a sufficient quantity of cherry for

39. Letter from Nyanza Agricultural Officer to Deputy Director of Plant Industries, August 8, 1936 (KNA: PC NZA AGR 1/2/9/2).

40. Letter from Kisii Agricultural Officer to Nyanza Agricultural Officer, August 24, 1936 (KNA: Agric. Kisumu Coff/1).

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drying and fermenting, the stations only accepted cherries on a given one or two days each week.⁴¹

Thus by 1940 four major issues had been resolved. The crop was to be sold as parchment rather than mbuni, and a pulping station was erected in each main growing area. This was the basis on which the future industry was to develop. Secondly, the idea of having a European supervisor never gained support, and locally trained Gusii managed the stations, although the final authority rested with the Department of Agriculture. Third, the principle of a self-supporting industry was accepted, although during this period the industry still received considerable financial support from the Local Native Council. Finally, group coffee processing became the accepted practise, so that a grower was paid according to the overall quality of the coffee processed at his pulping station.

MARKETING THE COFFEE

The question of how to market the coffee was not given serious attention until August 1936, when the first coffee trees planted in the district began bearing cherries. Since the pulping stations had not yet been built, the Agricultural Officer asked a Mr. Gethin, a European trader and businessman in Kisii town, to sell the first batch of cherries as mbuni. He asked if Mr. Gethin would be willing to serve as agent to deliver and sell the parchment in Nairobi once pulping stations were operating, feeling that this responsibility should be "put in the hands of a reliable European".⁴² The Deputy Director of Plant Industries in the Department of Agriculture thought the Agricultural Officer should weigh the coffee of each owner and dispatch lots to Nairobi, where the coffee would be cleaned, cured, graded and handed over to the Kenya Planters Co-operative Union for sale.⁴³

The Provincial Commissioner told the Agricultural Officer to have Mr. Gethin state his terms and present this and any other agent's offers to the

41. Arabica Coffee Quarterly Report, S.K., first quarter 1938 (KNA: Agric. Kisumu A/Coff/1/1); letter from Agricultural Officer and Experimentalist, Scott Agricultural Laboratory, to Deputy Director of Plant Industries, March 17, 1938; and letter from Agricultural Officer and Experimentalist, Scott Agricultural Laboratory, to Kisii Agricultural Officer, September 9, 1938 (KNA: Agric. Kisumu Coff/1).

42. Letter from Kisii Agricultural Officer to Nyanza Agricultural Officer, August 24, 1936 (KNA: Agric. Kisumu Coff/1).

43. Letter from Deputy Director of Plant Industries to Nyanza Agricultural Officer, November 12, 1936 (KNA: Agric. Kisumu Coff/1).

growers. He also advised that the growers should discuss the firm to which the agent should sell. He warned that an administrative official should "stop short of giving any advice preferential to any particular firm or person".⁴⁴

The records do not indicate that the proposed discussion with the growers was ever held. Rather it appears that only Chief Musa was consulted, along with the District Commissioner and Mr. Gethin. Gethin agreed to take the coffee at Kisii and pay the growers about half its value at that time. He would send it to Nairobi, where it was recommended that he deal with the Kenya Planters Co-operative Union. After the coffee was sold, the Agricultural Officer would calculate the amount still due the growers after deducting the agent's commission and other expenses.⁴⁵

The officers agreed that the initial payment to growers should be as high as possible to encourage production. The Provincial Agricultural Officer preferred that "the Local Native Council continue to take a share in the development of this new industry rather than dishearten the original planters by deducting too much from their price".⁴⁶

Just as planned, the first parchment was sent from Kisii to Nairobi in December 1937, amounting to approximately 2,900 pounds, with Mr. Gethin acting as agent. The grading and sale of the coffee was handled by the Kenya Planters Co-operative Union. The farmers received a payment when the coffee was sent and the balance after expenses when it had been sold.

Two years later the Agricultural Officer assumed responsibility for marketing the coffee so that the farmers would not have to pay the five per cent agent's commission. Mr. Gethin agreed that his firm would act only as transporters. A further provision to streamline the industry and provide greater returns to growers was that monthly payments be made at approximately two-thirds the value of the cherries delivered, using funds advanced by the Local Native Council. After the coffee had been sold in Nairobi, the money was sent to the Council, and about every six months the remainder due to the farmers was paid out.⁴⁷ However, during the

44. Letter from Nyanza Provincial Commissioner to Nyanza Senior Agricultural Officer, July 5, 1937 (KNA: Agric. Kisumu Coff/1).

45. Letter from Kisii Agricultural Officer to Nyanza Agricultural Officer, July 20, 1937 (KNA: Agric. Kisumu Coff/1).

46. Letter from Nyanza Senior Agricultural Officer to Kisii Agricultural Officer, August 21, 1937 (KNA: Agric. Kisumu Coff/1).

47. Letter from Kisii Agricultural Officer to Nyanza Senior Agricultural Officer, August 11, 1939 (KNA: Agric. Kisumu A/Coff/1).

1940/41 season sales were made through the wartime Supply Board (Coffee Control), and only a small initial payment was made to the growers.

Transport costs evidently made quite an inroad into profits, for in 1940 the Agricultural Officer asked the District Traffic Superintendent if freight reductions were possible for coffee. The transportation of parchment to Nairobi was costing eighteen cents per one hundred pound mile, and it seems that no reduction was actually obtained.⁴⁸

The price received for Gusii coffee depended on the grade and the world market price, except during 1940/41 when the price was controlled by the wartime Supply Board. The coffee was generally of high quality during the period under study except for 1942. The first harvest in 1937/38 received a Grade A classification which is a high rating. In 1939, 85 per cent of the coffee in three dispatches received class four or above, which is the higher class of coffee, while the following year 75 per cent of the coffee in one dispatch received this grade. It appears that 57 per cent of the total coffee marketed in 1941 was of the higher grades, but in 1942 this figure dropped to 37 per cent, due to heavy rains and inadequate space for fermenting and drying during the busiest picking seasons.⁴⁹ Although exact information on prices is fragmentary, it appears that between 1938 and early 1940 growers normally received between five and six cents per pound of coffee cherry.⁵⁰ During 1940/41 when sales were made through the Supply Board, payment dropped to four cents per pound.⁵¹

48. Letter from Kisii Agricultural Officer to District Traffic Superintendent, May 15, 1940 (KNA: Agric. Kisumu A/Coff/1/1).

49. Compiled from Arabica Coffee Quarterly Report, S.K., 1939, 1940, 1941 and 1942 (KNA: Agric. Kisumu A/Coff/1/1).

50. From a dispatch of 40 bags in 1938, the growers received approximately shs 29 per hundredweight of parchment. Computed at a 5:1 ratio of cherry to parchment, the payment to growers was approximately 6 cents per pound of cherry. For the consignment of December 1939, the growers received 26 cents per pound of parchment, which is equivalent to approximately 5 cents per pound of cherry. The last of the 1939/40 season's crop sold for a low figure of shs 36 per hundredweight, or about 3½ cents per pound of cherry for all grades. [sic] Arabica Coffee Quarterly Report, S.K., third quarter 1938, second quarter 1940 and first quarter 1941 (KNA: Agric. Kisumu A/Coff/1/1).

51. Arabica Coffee Quarterly Report, S.K., third quarter 1941 and fourth quarter 1940 (KNA: Agric. Kisumu A/Coff/1/1).

An interesting side issue arose when marking the coffee was considered. The Director of Agriculture suggested the compulsory use of the term "native arabica" followed possibly by the district or province. He claimed that, "whatever mark the coffee bears on reaching the Nairobi market, its price will probably not differ from that of European grown coffee, quality for quality".⁵² The marking would be retained for exportation. The Provincial Agricultural Officer for Nyanza objected that, "there is still a strong feeling in Kenya settled areas that anything produced by natives is bound to be inferior quality and I should like to recommend a name which will not cause deflation of price and yet be fair to the established producers". He felt that "some name less pointed might suit the purpose".⁵³ However, the District Commissioner and the Agricultural Officer for South Kavirondo had no objection to the term "native", and it was adopted, particularly because government felt obliged to the European growers to make a clear distinction between European and African grown coffee.⁵⁴

EXPANSION LIMITED BY THE COLONIAL GOVERNMENT

During the early years of coffee growing in Gusiiland, the local administrators encouraged the expansion of the industry, ignoring the stipulation made by the Director of Agriculture in 1933 that individual ownership by Africans be limited to 100 trees, unless "the native had sufficient experience, ability and capital to justify a larger ownership". As of November 1937, the number of trees per grower ranged from 134 to 7,632, as shown in Table One, and 51 per cent of the coffee in the district was owned by only 6 growers.⁵⁵ Plantings on the farmers' own land were limited to one-fourth acre, which was equivalent to 134 trees, and if a grower proved competent he could request another one-fourth acre of seedlings every year. At this time, in response to criticism from the acting Director of Agriculture, the local staff limited plantings to one-eighth of an acre equivalent to 70 trees.

52. Letter from Director of Agriculture to Kisumu and Nyeri Senior Agricultural Officers, November 2, 1937 (KNA: Agric. Kisumu Coff/1).

53. Letter from Nyanza Senior Agricultural Officer to Kisii Agricultural Officer, November 4, 1937 (KNA: Agric. Kisumu Coff/1).

54. Monthly Bulletin of the Coffee Board of Kenya, III (35) November 1937, p. 199; and letter from Director of Agriculture to Nyanza Senior Agricultural Officer, December 9, 1937 (KNA: Agric. Kisumu Coff/1).

55. Compiled from List of Coffee Growers, cited in footnote 3.

There were no sound economic reasons for preventing the extension of African coffee growing. The policy of limiting African coffee growing was bound up with the idea that the native coffee plots were only an experiment, even after they had been successfully in production for a number of years. When the Gusii coffee growers were restricted to one-eighth acre plantings, the Deputy Director of Agriculture reminded the District Agricultural Officer:

The policy is to experiment with native coffee growing, to judge whether natives will take to the crop, care for it properly, etc. To make this experiment a true one, it must be representative of the large numbers of natives who would grow coffee in the future, and not merely representative of a few who are able to plant large numbers of trees.⁵⁶

The real reason, of course, that this notion of experimentation was maintained for such a long time was the pressure put on the government by the European coffee growers. Statements confirming government acquiescence to this pressure appear throughout the period under question. For example, when opening the annual meeting of the Coffee Board, which represented the European planters, in August 1934, the Governor of Kenya remarked that he was aware of the planters' anxiety concerning government's steps to initiate African coffee production. He assured them that the European coffee industry "must on no account be jeopardised by indiscriminate, uncontrolled planting" by Africans.⁵⁷

At a meeting in the fall of 1935, the Director of Agriculture admitted that the current experiment on the basis of block coffee farms was not a fair one and agreed that the areas should be extended within which coffee planting would be allowed though without increasing the actual acreage under coffee. The Colonial Secretary reminded the officials present that he had assured a deputation from the Coffee Board in 1933 that, "Government had no intention of departing from its policy of limiting coffee growing by natives in its initial stages to experimental areas and of prohibiting promiscuous and haphazard planting". At a later time when the trees in the African areas were bearing, it might be proposed to the Board to allow individual plantations in approved areas, subject to

56. Letter from Deputy Director of Plant Industries to Nyanza Senior Agricultural Officer, December 29, 1937 (KNA: Agric. Kisumu Coff/1).

57. "His Excellency and the Coffee Planters," East African Standard, August 4, 1934, p. 14.

Table 1. Number of Coffee Trees per Grower in Gusiland, November 1937.

Number of Growers with	Number of Trees
1	7,632
1	5,370
2	2,148
2	1,074
1	671
12	537
1	402
18	268
48	134
Totals 86	38,219

Source: Compiled from List of Coffee Growers, South Kavirondo, November 30, 1937 (KNA: Agric. Kisumu Coff/1).

supervision and regulations, but he "personally had always been in favour of proceeding very slowly with native coffee growing".⁵⁸ Officials at the provincial level continued to press for African farmers to be allowed to plant a limited number of coffee trees on their own land, and in 1936 this resulted in the adoption of the neighborhood concentration system. However, this shift in policy certainly did not mean that the concept of experimentation had been altered or that substantial increases in the acreage under coffee would be allowed.

In November 1937, government reconfirmed its position on the experimental nature of African coffee growing to the Coffee Board, and the Board complained that there was a serious shortage of labour especially during harvest season, because Africans had become reluctant to work on European farms. This, it was claimed, was due to the increased prosperity in the African areas caused by rises in produce prices and the government policy of initiating cash crops in the reserves, pursued with "rather too great an enthusiasm". The Board claimed that the situation did not really benefit the Africans because the cash they were earning in the Reserves was no greater than what they could earn anyway by working for Europeans, and serious losses were being inflicted on the European agricultural sector and thus ipso facto on "the prosperity of the colony as a whole".⁵⁹

The interest in coffee growing had increased in Gusiiland so that in 1938 the Agricultural Officer reported that the demand for seedlings exceeded the supply, and if it were not for this the total limit of 100 acres established by the administration would have been reached. Land was being prepared for coffee which would bring the total acreage up to the limit, and new applicants were being turned away.⁶⁰

58. Note of a meeting held in the Secretariat on October 23, 1935 (KNA: FC NZA AGR 1/2/9/2).

59. Coffee Board of Kenya, Memorandum on the Labour Position, May 6, 1938 (KNA: Dept. Agric. C/Coff/1/3/8 Vol. III).

60. Arabica Coffee Quarterly Report, S.K., second quarter 1938 (KNA: Agric. Kisumu A/Coff/1/1).

In July 1938, permission was requested to increase the limit on coffee growing in the gazetted areas of South Kavirondo to 200 acres. The Provincial Commissioner delayed forwarding the request to the Director of Agriculture because he had received reports of Coffee Berry Disease in the area, but after a month he admitted that the reports were unfounded. He supported the request for extension on the grounds that the industry was making satisfactory progress and the Local Native Council was spending considerable funds to advance the industry beyond the experimental stage. However, the Director of Agriculture refused to grant permission to extend the 100 acre limit, claiming that all varieties of coffee had been found unsuitable to the district except the Blue Mountain variety, and it had not yet been proved successful.⁶¹

In April 1940, the Chief Native Commissioner urged that the African coffee growing experiment be recognised as a success and wider planting be allowed in South Kavirondo. He wrote:

A letter from the Director of Agriculture written in 1933... clearly shows that he envisaged that in such circumstances thousands of natives would be able to plant, subject to certain not arduous conditions which he described. If the experimental period is not declared to be at an end, at some time the natives can very well complain, with reason, of Government's insincerity. As far as South Kavirondo is concerned, my belief is that the experiment has only proved the suitability of a fairly restricted area (part of the Kisii highlands) and not a tremendous number of natives would ask for licences. The amount of inspection would probably put most of them off and I doubt whether in the second year, as many as 100 would be planting in addition to the 179 who are now doing so. It appears that by refusing this permission, we do the European coffee industry no good, we give the natives an opportunity to accuse us of breach of faith, and our own consciences are uncomfortable.⁶²

The Chief Native Commissioner also raised a legal question. He pointed out that the section of the Crop Production and Livestock Ordinance which was used to prohibit coffee planting by Africans in fact did not allow for differentiation of a particular area or between Africans and Europeans. Any such law which allowed for racial discrimination "would probably have been disallowed by the Secretary of State".

61. Letter from Director of Agriculture to Nyanza Provincial Commissioner, September 17, 1938 (KNA: Agric. Kisumu Coff/1).

62. Copy from Chief Native Commissioner, April 30, 1940 (KNA: PC NZA AGR 1/2/9/2).

Early in 1941, government authorised the extension of coffee growing in South Kavirondo to 200 acres. New planting was to be strictly limited by the capacity of the agricultural department staff to ensure sound husbandry methods, prevention of soil erosion and control of pests and diseases. The Provincial Commissioner felt that "our aim must be a steady and cautious development",⁶³ held to an extension of twenty-five acres in 1941. However, the District Commissioner retorted that since the permission to expand had taken the district officers "by surprise", there were only enough seedlings for about three additional acres in the nurseries. He suggested that plans be made immediately for expansion in 1942.⁶³

When permission was granted to extend coffee growing to 200 acres, there were 184 growers with a total of about 94 acres, and an additional 5 acres planted in the nurseries. The largest annual increase in growers and acres had taken place in 1937 when the neighborhood concentration scheme was introduced, as shown in Table Two and Figure One. A substantial increase had also taken place in 1938, after which the rate dropped primarily due to government refusal to increase the acreage limit and the war-time emphasis on cereal crop production, rather than to any lack of interest on the part of the Gusii farmers. In 1942, about thirty-two acres of coffee were planted, the largest annual increase, but only twenty-seven new growers were added. This indicates that a number of former growers extended their fields, because the number of seedlings given out to each grower tended to be limited to seventy, enough for one-eighth of an acre.

63. Letter from District Commissioner to Nyanza Provincial Commissioner, February 24, 1941 (KNA: Agric. Kisumu A/Coff/1/1).

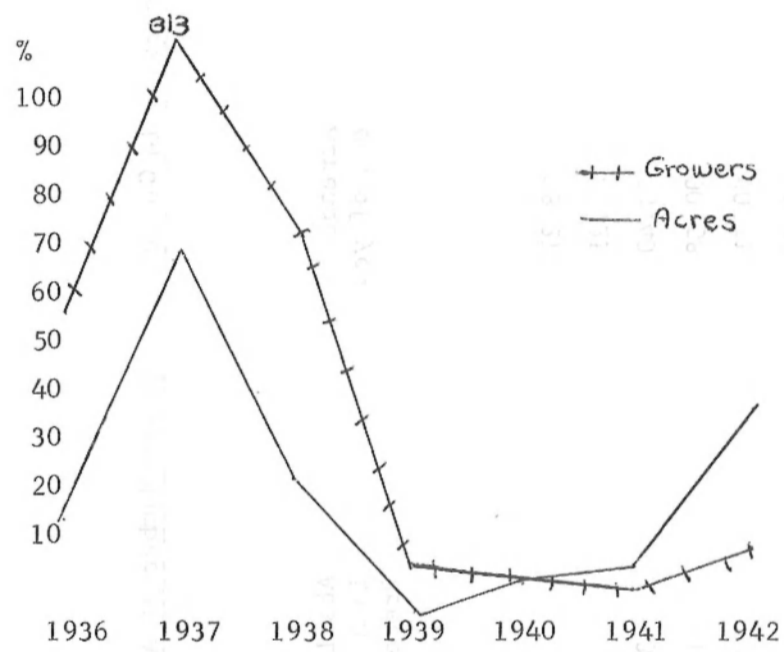
Table 2. Increases in Coffee Acreage and Number of Adopters in Gusiland, 1935-1942.

Year	Acreage at end of year*	Absolute Increase in Acreage Over Preceding Year	Number of Growers at end of Year	Absolute Increase in Number of Growers Over Preceding year
1935	38.21		15	
1936	43.21	5	23	8
1937	73.40	30.19	95	72
1938	90.58	17.48	166	71
1939	90.51	7.37	177	11
1940	94.76	4.25	186	9
1941	99.90	5.14	195	9
1942	132.37	32.47	222	27

* This acreage does not include the nurseries.

Source: Compiled from Arabica Coffee Quarterly Report, South Kavirondo, fourth quarter 1935 - 1942 (KNA: Agric. Kisumu A/Coff/1/1).

Figure 1. Percentage Increase in Number of Growers and Acres under Coffee in Gusiland, 1936-1942.



n.b. This acreage does not include the nurseries.

Source: Compiled from Arabica Coffee Quarterly Report, South Kavirondo, fourth quarter 1936-1942 (KNA: Agric. Kisumu A/Coff/1/1).

Husbandry

The question of how well the Gusii farmers took care of their coffee plots is particularly interesting in light of the fears in this regard frequently voiced by the European planters. The Agricultural Officer wrote cryptically in 1937, "It is comforting to know that the Kenya Coffee Board is alive to the danger of allowing native plantations to be sited too close to the European estates. It was most encouraging to see these well tended native patches after passing through so many derelict [European] coffee estates."⁶⁴

The information available on the level of coffee husbandry in South Kavirondo is insufficient for a precise evaluation, but a general description may be inferred. Comments in the Quarterly Reports ranging from "husbandry good", "husbandry poor" to "husbandry improving" with very little actual evidence do not provide a sound basis for analysis. Better indicators would be the amount of cherries delivered but here the information is inadequate, or the quality of the marketed coffee, but this depends very much on the drying and fermenting process carried out at the pulping stations.

The level of husbandry may be inferred from the general attitude of government officers and the extent to which threats and prosecutions were necessary under the Native Grown Coffee Rules. The district officers consistently considered the experiment a success, and the initial incidents of poor husbandry were rightly attributed to the difficulties of the block farm system. A few local leaders were identified as uncooperative or apathetic, but the farmers as a whole were never described in this way. Chief Musa's coffee fields in particular were a source of official pride.

64. Monthly Report, S.K., November 1937 (KNA: Agric. Kisumu Rept/19).

The officers' efforts to extend the acreage under coffee and to gazette new areas for coffee growing indicate their faith in the Gusii farmers' adoption of proper husbandry practises.

To what extent was the generally satisfactory level of husbandry due to the threat of prosecution? Certainly growers were aware that they could be fined if their fields were neglected, but apparently the Agricultural Officer was reluctant to carry out prosecutions because the success of the experiment depended on the cooperation of the growers. In addition, since many of the growers were government workers they could be pressured through their employment rather than resorting to prosecution.

Between 1933 and 1944, it seems few warnings were issued and even fewer prosecutions carried out, with fines ranging from shs 5/ to 10/.⁶⁵ Six growers were fined at Nyankururu in 1937 for failing to keep their plots on the block farm clean, and in 1941 one grower in Kitutu was warned to weed his field, but evidently he complied since there is no evidence of prosecution. In 1942, four growers at Mogungu and three at Kitutu were given written warnings to clean their fields. Those at Mogungu complied, but those at Kitutu were prosecuted and fined. If one considers that by the end of 1942 there were 222 growers, the number who received warnings or were fined seems quite small.

65. Abnel Irori, Ogembo area, Bassi, interviewed May 20, 1971, stated that shs 10/ was usually paid, but Gabriel Nyamweya, cited above, referred to a fine of shs 5/.

CONCLUSION

In looking back on this period, some interesting observations can be made. For one thing, during the initiation and development of the coffee industry in South Kavirondo from 1933 to 1942, all important decisions were resolved by European officials. There is no evidence that the African growers as a group were ever consulted, or that their leaders ever advocated any major changes. Since coffee growing was an innovation introduced from outside Gusii society, the growers tended to be unaware of possible alternatives to decisions made by officials.

Also on the issue of expansion, as well as on other questions which arose during the period, the government officers at the district and provincial level tended to be supportive of the Gusii coffee growing programme, although frequently in a paternalistic manner. In contrast, national level officials tended to be out of touch with the actual situation in Gusiiland, but keenly attentive to the interests and fears of the European settler population. For example, once the Gusii farmers no longer felt afraid that government would take their land, there were more applicants to take up coffee growing than could be accommodated. The limitation on the rate of adoption was entirely the result of government policy in line with pressure from the European settlers.

It is also interesting that the European officials tended to make decisions which would keep the Gusii coffee industry wholly in the hands of the Africans and under the control of government. For example, the suggestion that a European be employed to supervise the pulping stations never gained support. Rather the stations were managed by experienced local people, under the supervision of the coffee field staff and ultimately the Agricultural Officer. In the same way, initially a European businessman was used as an agent to sell the coffee, but eventually this function was taken over by the Agricultural Officer himself. These decisions led the way to the eventual formation of the industry on a cooperative basis under Gusii leadership.