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PRAGMATISM AND THE PRIMARY SCHOOL:
the case of a non-rural village

by

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A B S T R A C T

I.D.S. Discussion
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The case of a non-rural village

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The successful adaptation of an educational system to the needs of a particular area of a country requires that those needs be carefully investigated and that they not be assumed a priori. Too often economic patterns and behavior styles are polarized as either "rural" or "urban", "agricultural" or "industrial", "traditional" or "modern". Such dichotomies may exist more in the minds of the educational planners than they do in reality. The aim of this paper is to analyze the educational needs of one small community in Kenya in terms of its changing socio-economic patterns, and to show how attitudes towards the school system have their roots in this setting. The data are drawn from a 19 month anthropological study in South Maragoli Location of Kakamega District, Western Province.

The first section of the paper presents a short description of Maragoli's social setting, concentrating upon those characteristics of the area which seem to have direct bearing upon the educational system and implications for educational policy. Parental attitudes towards the primary school are then set against this backdrop. There follows an examination of the processes by which these attitudes are transformed into actions which inhibit the institution from acting as an independent variable in the initiation of social change. In the final section, the expectations and experiences of the school leavers are analyzed within the context of the community's educational needs.

INTRODUCTION

The most common complaint made about primary schools in developing countries is that they are oriented towards the needs of industrial centers rather than the "rural" areas where the majority of school leavers are destined to spend their lives. In Kenya, the 1966 Kericho Conference on Education, Employment, and Rural Development pinpointed this problem and urged that educational planning be designed to curb the flow of youth to urban areas by "providing a stronger environmental bias to the curriculum which would lay the foundations for a fruitful rural and agricultural life".¹ However, the successful adaptation of an educational system to the needs of a particular area of the country requires that those needs be carefully investigated and that they not be assumed a priori. Too often economic patterns and behavior styles are polarized as either "rural" or "urban", "agricultural" or "industrial", "traditional" or "modern". Such dichotomies may exist more in the minds of the educational planners than they do in reality. When educational statistics and the results of attitude tests are presented within these broad antithetical contexts, they notoriously appear pathological. Educational planners then underestimate the ease by which these obviously dysfunctional attitudes can be changed by curriculum innovations or in-service courses for teachers.

The aim of this paper is to analyze the educational needs of one small community in Kenya in terms of its changing socio-economic patterns, and to show how attitudes towards the school system have their roots within this setting. The data are drawn from a 19 month study in South Maragoli Location of Kakamega District, Western Province. As part of a larger study concerning the effects of labour migration upon agricultural enterprise, a tracer project was conducted by the writer on 139 Standard VII leavers from three primary schools, situated within a one mile radius. The aim of the project was to investigate the leaver's employment expectations, his family background, the network connections by which he enters into the labour market, and finally the way in which the community interprets and manipulates the school system to suit its particular needs. The statistical data used in the paper are those which have so far emerged from the school study and also from a larger sub-location sample of 159 households. While several questionnaires, intended to cross-check one another, were administered to students and parents, the qualitative material results from an intensive study utilizing anthropological field techniques in the schools' constituent villages.

1. James Sheffield (ed.), Education, Employment and Rural Development: Report of the Kericho (Kenya) Conference, September 25 to October 1, 1966 (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1967), p. 26.

The first section of the paper presents a short description of Maragoli's social setting, concentrating upon those characteristics of the area which seem to have direct bearing upon the educational system and implications for educational policy. Parental attitudes towards the primary school are then set against this backdrop. There follows an examination of the processes by which these attitudes are transformed into actions which inhibit the institution from acting as an independent variable in the initiation of social change. In the final section, the expectations and experiences of the school leavers are analyzed within the context of the community's educational needs.

THE SETTING

A number of factors have combined in recent years to make Maragoli one of the greatest "problem" areas for economic development in Kenya. The single most outstanding characteristic of Maragoli is its population density, estimated in 1969 at approximately 1,500 persons per square mile. The Location consists of 35.5 square miles divided into farm units which average two to three acres and six household members in size. Although there has been some Maragoli migration into surrounding locations, these lands are almost as densely populated, and the understandable territorial protectiveness of other Abaluhya sub-tribes and of Mandi and Luo neighbors discourages expansion.

Maragoli is situated 15 miles north of the port town of Kisumu, and there is a good network of roads leading to Kisumu and to other major towns in Kenya. This transportation factor, together with adequate rainfall, available cash crops, and the possibility of developing internal markets, gives Maragoli a high potential for agricultural development. However, population pressure on the land had long ago created a large number of uneconomic farm units. For the vast majority of farmers, improvements in their level of farm technology might allow them at best, only self-sufficiency in the production of maize and beans - the area's staple foods - which are now partially imported into the area.

The Maragoli response to their worsening agricultural situation has been to remove as many persons from the land as possible. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, labour migration to the major towns and to the large farming estates of East Africa has acted as a safety valve for the overcrowded conditions on the land. Today, in

the Maragoli sub-location in which the study was conducted, 67% of adult males between 20 and 60 years of age work, or are in search of work, outside Kakamega District at any given time. Furthermore, the 1969 census shows a 100:132 ratio of men to women in the Location as a whole. Maragoli, in a sense, has become a "bedroom community" in which a population dominated by women and children depends upon remittances from outside to pay taxes and school fees, and to buy clothing and household articles.

For many years the farms of Maragoli have offered no opportunity for the majority of the young. In fact, their remaining on the land can be interpreted as a great disservice to their parents and younger siblings. Around the turn of the century, when missionaries were settling into the area, pressure on the land was exacerbated by several famines, rising consumer expectations, and the introduction of taxation. Therefore, the educational programmes introduced by the missionaries, which expanded opportunities for wage employment, were welcomed by the Maragoli with an enthusiasm far greater than that of their neighbors. References in the archives of the Kaimosi Friends Mission indicate the early pragmatism of the Maragoli in their outlook towards education, and the constant pressure they exerted upon the mission to expand its educational activities.² For example, by 1914 there were as many as 2,662 students enrolled in Maragoli schools - an outstanding number in the whole of East Africa at that time.

From the start, the ecological conditions of the area determined the orientation of the school in removing youngsters from the land. However, the desire for wage income was not accompanied by alienation from the local environment. Many of those students fortunate enough to pass through the early school system were rewarded with wage employment as teachers, evangelists, or government functionaries; and the preference of these high status persons, whose skills were in demand all over Kenya, was to remain within their own district. In addition, the majority of those who did migrate in the early years were "target income workers" who accepted six month labour contracts in order to fulfill their monetary needs. They then returned home for several months until wage employment was required once more. Outside employment, from its inception, has been a necessity for most Maragoli rather than a choice.

2. Kaimosi Friends African Mission, Annual Reports.
(Kaimosi, Kenya).

The tradition of labour migration is further strengthened by an ever increasing brideprice, which usually necessitates late marriage. Most Maragoli men do not, therefore, have control over land or labour until they are middle-aged. Descent is recognized along the agnatic line, and inheritance of family land, cattle, and other possessions is patrilineal and ideally distributed equally between sons. However, the eldest son has an advantage over his brothers in his prior claim for brideprice cattle, his right to the first share of land, and his executor powers over the estate, which he shares with his mother, should the father die while some of his sons are too young to receive their inheritance. The youngest brother is also favored, in that he has rights to the land which the father has reserved for himself in his old age. But whatever their sibling position, few sons receive land before marriage or before the birth of children. In addition, the recently introduced programme of land registration in the Location strengthens the father's control over farm fragmentation and weakens the claims of unfavoured dependents. One probable effect of this program will be that a high percentage of young men are forced off the land permanently.

Although inheritance has been restricted traditionally to males, changing economic patterns in Maragoli, including the sale of land and the labour migration of men, have given new rights to women in the control of farm resources. Recent land cases in the Location show that daughters are now able to inherit "omulimi gwagulwa" (purchased land), as opposed to "omulimi gwaguga" (ancestral land) which is passed down through the agnatic line (to which they still have no claim), if they are without brothers or if they are particularly favoured by the father. Furthermore, as the growing dependency upon a cash economy and the increasing population pressure on the land make obligations to a large extended family more difficult to fulfill, many uninherited widows take a central role in the division of their husband's land and in decisions concerning paid labour and cash crops. The position of women in the community is further strengthened by their independent (though tiny) incomes, by their control over children, and by the leadership roles they have assumed in local politics, church, and school since their men have been away. These new roles are reflected in mothers' attitudes towards the school and in girls' expectations for the future.

Freedom from farm labour also has direct bearing upon the Maragoli school system. The basic domestic group in Maragoli is the elementary family, sometimes extended to include an aged parent, a daughter-in-law, or a niece or nephew. It is mainly within this unit that household and farming duties are distributed, and food and income shared. However, most families have diverse sources of income. Women generally have independent part-time occupations as local vegetable traders, potmakers, or members of hired farm labour groups. Many "underemployed" men brew beer, trade in cattle, have specialized skills (carpentry, tailoring, butchery, thatching, rope twining, etc.), or own small shops. School children often take small jobs when school is not in session, in order to earn pocket money. These varied sources of income, as well as small farm sizes and a non-rigid division of labour between sexes and ages lessen the family's dependence upon the labour of each of its members. Thus, the adolescent can be released from farm duties with little financial loss to the family. During those seasons in which heavy farm labour requirements overlap with school terms, students generally are replaced on the farm by hired labour. This release from farm duties, which will be discussed later on, allows students a long career in attending school.

Kinship obligations within the extended family further encourage school attendance. Many of the traditional responsibilities for aiding relatives and the rights to benefit from the economic position of extended kin can no longer be fulfilled in a situation where resources are extremely limited and status is acquired more by the accumulation of wealth, than by its distribution. Yet the extended family and clan group still play important roles in Maragoli's social organization. One such role which has direct bearing upon the educational system is the accommodation which relatives in town provide to school leavers in search of employment and to secondary school aspirants unable to obtain places in schools at home. Since the network of almost every Maragoli family extends into the major towns of Kenya, the mobility of youngsters seeking jobs and school places is greatly facilitated.

Those, however, who are unable to continue their education or find wage employment have great difficulty in earning a decent income on their own. For wage employment and entrepreneurial activity at home are closely connected. Cash-crop or dairy farming requires an initial financial investment of substantial size, given the average income.

In most cases, the farmer must purchase land to add to his inherited plot before he can have the minimal acreage required for any cash enterprise. Land in Maragoli, because of its social security value, usually sells at over 4,000/- an acre, and a plot on a settlement scheme is difficult to acquire. But even if the farmer overcomes his land constraint, he still needs money for whatever agricultural inputs his enterprise requires: seed, fertilizer, equipment, labour, animals, etc. Therefore, most progressive farmers in Maragoli are persons who have returned from several years of wage employment outside or who have non-farming occupations within the home area.

The same financial outlay is required to become a full-time "fundi" or craftsman. As previously mentioned, Maragoli has a plentiful supply of semi-skilled, part-time craftsmen. However, these local fundis, with simple training and insufficient equipment, cannot earn a living with which to support their families (most of these men earn between 30/- and 60/- per month). Aspiring full-time entrepreneurs need not only high quality training to make themselves outstanding in a sea of craftsmen, and to satisfy the town-bred standards of the community, but also money to buy equipment, trade licenses, and shop (or shed) facilities to meet health regulations. Most important, they require land and labour of their own in order to lessen profit-draining obligations to parents and relatives on whom they would otherwise depend. Too often these socio-economic constraints on youngsters are forgotten in the designs of agricultural programmes and technical training courses which historically have been aimed at "elementary skills" in the "pastoral rural" areas.

Money flows into Maragoli in the form of remittances, which can be spent on agricultural products and on consumer goods and services. Yet few youngsters straight out of school can take advantage of the opportunities for full-time local self-employment. Furthermore, as opportunities for wage employment in towns steadily decline, there will be a drop in the percentage of middle-aged persons with capital to finance entrepreneurial enterprises at home.

Although Maragoli is located 250 miles from Nairobi and has no town center of its own, it cannot be classified as a "rural" or "agricultural" area. Instead, it might be more appropriate to think of Maragoli with its dense population, two to three acre family plots, spread of social services, and dependency upon town income, as a dislocated Nairobi suburb. Furthermore, the constant flow of men and money

between town and Location functions to articulate the community into the mainstream of contemporary Kenyan life. The discussion now turns to the ways in which these area characteristics influence parental attitudes towards the orientation of the school.

PARENTAL ATTITUDES TOWARDS EDUCATION

Given the situation in which the land can no longer offer opportunities to the young, Maragoli parents have turned to the school as the only alternative at hand which might provide their children with a satisfactory future. From the time that the school system was introduced into the area, parents have viewed education as an instrument for removing youngsters from the land. The farm sizes of the fathers of the 139 students in the tracer group are indicated in Table 1.

Table 1 FATHERS' MEASURED LAND SIZE

Less than 3 acres	65%
3 - 5 acres	25%
more than 5 acres	<u>10%</u>
	100% n = 139

The fathers of the 86 boys in the sample have an average of four sons each, and only seven boys can expect to be given at least two acres of land - the figure that has been suggested as the minimum viable acreage for a farm in Maragoli.³

Many fathers see the education which they provide for their sons as a substitute for the land which they cannot give them. They hope that education will lead to employment which will enable their sons to purchase their own farms. As one father with six sons and an acre and a half of land put it, "They cannot bring families to eat from my land. But I give them (school) fees so they can have luck and buy pieces on the settlement". Furthermore, fathers feel that once a child has obtained wage employment, he is responsible for the welfare and school fees of his siblings. He may also be responsible for the welfare of his mother, especially if the father has more than one wife. Out of the tracer group, 44 students who were attending school in 1971 had at least one employed older brother. Of these, 30 (68%) had their school fees paid by siblings.

3. Ministry of Agriculture, memo in Vihiga Division file concerning minimum viable farm acreage in Western Vihiga, 1970.

In the 14 remaining cases the fathers paid the fees, and in 10 of these they were earning salaries far greater than those of their employed sons.

Women, with their greater participation in community affairs provide a major thrust behind educational expansion in Maragoli. With husbands working outside Kakamega District for a good part of their adult lives, women have come to rely more upon their children for support. Most working men send home monthly remittances to their wives. But with a lack of job security in towns, especially in the domestic work in which middle-aged Maragoli men specialize, many women must depend upon more than one income with which to run their household. Also, with the decline in frequency of widow inheritance, sons have come to take over their uncle's responsibility in caring for their mother in her old age. Many wives, in fact, coordinate visits to town with the beginning of school terms so that they can carry back the fees in person. Although some men talked about school fees as a deterrent to having large families, younger women seem to be bearing a slightly higher number of children in a shorter period of time than did their seniors. This increased dependence upon children reflects parental feelings that welfare and social security are lacking, and leads to a situation in which parents try to hedge their bet that education will pay off by putting many children into the school system for as long as possible.

Parents have come to rely upon daughters as well as sons for income and support. Apart from job opportunities for girls, a daughter with a Standard VII education can now bring well over 1,000/- and five cows in dowry, and perhaps more important, conjugal ties with a well-to-do family. When questioned as to why they wished to educate their daughters, almost every parent responded that education was necessary for women to "advance in life". This positive attitude towards the education of women is a corollary to new roles and responsibilities that women have in the family, in the community, and in the country in general. Although girls have always lagged behind boys in primary school attendance, the situation is rapidly changing as a result of socio-economic patterns and resultant parental attitudes towards the education of daughters. 1971 Location statistics show a two:three ratio of girls to boys at the Standard VII level, and educational reports for Kakamega District over the past few years indicate that the enrolment of girls in primary schools is rapidly catching up with that of boys.

Enrolment swells, particularly in the lower standards are further encouraged by parental feelings that there should be equality between sons in their access to education. Although this is the parental ideal, advantage in sibling position occurs in education as well as in property inheritance. The eldest son has first claim on parental savings for school fees. Often those children who follow him have late starts entering Standard I or are held back in the lower primary grades where fees are less expensive, until the father can replenish his finances or until the elder child can pass through the system. Once the eldest son is earning an income, he will be expected to carry the expenses for his younger siblings. Thus, the last born is more likely to have a new source of finance upon which to rely for his fees.

Because parents feel dependent upon their offspring, and therefore want as many children as possible to have the education which they feel will lead to employment, the first priority for whatever capital parents are able to accumulate is school fees. Although recent experiments in Maragoli have shown that hybrid seed, fertilizer, a sufficient labour force, and good husbandry can more than double most current maize yields⁴, farmers complain that they cannot find the few hundred shillings with which to make this investment in their land. Furthermore, they are forced to sell a large proportion of what maize they do grow, directly after harvest, when prices are at their lowest, in order to pay school fees. For many years, cash-crop farming in Maragoli has been viewed only as a supplement to wage income. Even at nearby Chavakali Secondary School, which has a long established agricultural training program, the majority of Maragoli graduates enter non-agricultural employment out of necessity. While competition for jobs grows more keen, parents are tying up their money in an academic school system at the expense of other development enterprises at home.

The idea that education paves the way for wage employment is strongly imprinted upon the community. It is viewed as an historical factor exemplified by the middle-aged members of the community themselves. Teachers, in particular, are often singled out by parents as examples of the benefits of education. Most middle-aged teachers hold leadership positions in areas of community life outside the school. As the early products of a mission education and having long familiarity with government operation,

4. Peter Mook; Special Rural Development Program evaluation reports on Maize Credit Scheme, September 1971, November 1971 (Nairobi: Institute For Development Studies).

they play leading roles in church and local political affairs. Also, their steady but low salaries have both enabled and forced them to seize local entrepreneurial opportunities for supplementing their income. It is mainly these men who are the shopkeepers, mill owners, and progressive farmers in Maragoli. When household heads in the sub-location study were asked to name six persons in the community whom they most respected, 40% (the largest single percentage) mentioned people who were teachers. One might suspect, therefore, that children are forming attitudes about the role which education can play in their lives not from the material that is being taught, but from the teacher's physical presence in the classroom as a respected income earner.

The long tradition of education and wage employment in Maragoli also is revealed in the backgrounds of the parents.

Table 2: FATHERS' OCCUPATION BY LEVEL OF EDUCATION ATTAINED

Occupation	Level of Education			
	no educ.	Std. I-IV	Std. V-VIII	higher educ.
clerical/professional	-	-	31%	100%
skilled	-	9%	36%	-
unskilled	22%	51%	22%	-
jobless/farmer	78%	40%	11%	-
	100%(9)	100%(72)	100%(36)	100%(13) = 130 unknown 9

n = 139

Those fathers who have been able to educate their children up through primary school realize first hand the economic benefits of education. Like the teachers, the parents are a constant example for their children of why students should remain in the school system for as long as possible.

Table 3: PARENTAL POST-PRIMARY ASPIRATIONS FOR THEIR CHILDREN

continue with any education	66%
vocational training	9
immediate employment	10
secondary school	15
	100% n = 139

As Table 3 indicates, when parents were questioned as to what they would like their child to do after finishing primary school, only 15% of the parents specifically mentioned secondary education. Further discussion with the 92 parents who gave a more general answer revealed that they also preferred secondary education. However, since education is viewed as an instrument for obtaining employment, and since secondary education is no longer a guarantee of that employment, many parents appear ready to accept any educational program that will lead their children to jobs.

The parents had more difficulty in answering questions about occupational preferences for their children. Although there was some bias towards clerical occupations for boys and nursing for girls, parents repeatedly stated that choice of occupation was the child's prerogative. Apparently there is little parental pressure on job choice, thus allowing students adaptive flexibility to the labour market.

Many Maragoli parents have worked or lived in Kenya towns, on and off, for a large part of their lives. They have been involved in the employment scramble themselves and have been besieged by friends and family for jobs and accommodation. Thus, parents are well aware of the wage employment problems in the country. They express the view that town life is expensive and unattractive in comparison with life in Maragoli, and the vast majority of labour migrants claim that they would accept a lower salary if they could be employed at home. Although relatives still provide accommodation for visitors to town, they are generally unable to find them jobs. 68% of the parents questioned as to who could find their children jobs in Kenya, answered "no one".

In this peri-urban area, dependent upon non-agricultural income, Maragoli parents look to the school as the only channel through which their children can gain employment. Education, therefore, acts as the medium by which many obligations within the elementary family can be fulfilled. Parental pressure on students is aimed at the achievement of any employment which will provide them with decent futures and enable them to meet their family responsibilities. The desperation with which parents look to the school to solve their difficulties grows out of the historical and socio-economic setting of the area, and is reinforced by the personal backgrounds of the community members, themselves. The following section examines the ways in which these attitudes place constraints upon the operation of the primary school.

THE OPERATION OF THE PRIMARY SCHOOL

Parental attitudes towards education have had two major effects upon the school system. First, parents deliberately have forced the schools to prepare their children for employment. Within the context of the Maragoli setting, this means academic education for non-agricultural paid occupations. Second, in their enthusiasm to send as many children to school for as long as possible, parents have unwittingly slowed down the education system and lowered the standard of teaching. The two effects are closely interrelated.

Before responsibility for primary education was taken away from local government in 1970, the Kakamega County Council, in response to community pressure, spent over 80% of its budget on education. This percentage exceeded that of any other county council in Kenya, and in addition, Kakamega spent more money in absolute terms than any other district on teachers' salaries.

The District is well endowed with 462 primary schools, 42 of which are situated within South Maragoli's 35.5 square miles. However, Kakamega's 24 aided secondary schools (20 for boys and 4 for girls) provided only 12% of the District's 13,068 Standard VII students with an opportunity for continuing academic studies. (This percentage is much smaller for girls.) Feeling the pressure of this bottle-neck situation, parents have responded with a major effort to expand educational opportunities on their own without the aid of government. Contributing time and money, parents constructed 32 self-help "Harambee" secondary schools in the District with locally paid management and staff. South Maragoli currently has four such schools (one was taken over by Government) as well as one private high school.

Parents spend a very high percentage of their income on education. Besides school fees (ranging between 50/- to 90/- according to the grade), there are activity fees, building funds, school uniform expenses, watchmen's salaries, lunch programmes, and self-help construction and maintenance contributions. Yet despite this restricting expense, 73% of children aged 8 to 16 within the sub-location study were attending primary classes, and 33% of those aged 4 to 7 were in primary or nursery school. While the percentage of children who reach Standard VII is much lower than this, the proportion with some exposure to the school system is much higher. My sample was taken during the third school term, when there are fewer children attending classes than in the first term. Maragoli school

statistics reveal that in 1969, 1,464 children dropped out of school between terms one and two because their parents did not pay fees. This attendance drop off is most prominent in Standards I and II. Parents feel that all children should have equal access to education and, therefore, send as many children as possible to school in the first term, especially in the lower standards where fees are less expensive. Thus, many children spend several years popping in and out of the lower standards, marking time until their elder siblings complete their education.

A more serious blockage of the school system occurs in the upper standards as a result of manipulated repeating patterns for the Certificate of Primary Education examination. Although the spread of Harambee secondary schools has helped to ease the ratio of Standard VII to Form I places, enrolment in these institutions is relatively small. Most Harambee schools operate only one stream and have classes only up to Form II. Besides this, the schools generally have unqualified staff and have had to charge fees much higher than the aided schools. Parents, therefore, still prefer to have their children repeat Standard VII until they can raise their grades on the C.P.E. exam to an acceptable level for entrance to an aided secondary school.

Since the Government has placed a limit on the quantity and grade quality of children who may repeat Standard VII, parents and headmasters have had to work out a series of interesting under-cover techniques in the promotion and registration systems in order to make the proportion of repeaters appear smaller than it is. When students and school staff were questioned about repeating, the response was that only a very small number were involved in the process -- less than 20%. Only after a study of old registration books for the three neighborhood schools, and after discussion with parents and their neighbors, did a new picture of the repeating phenomenon appear. Of the 139 students in the tracer group, 58% had repeated Standard VII, 78% had repeated one grade in their school career, and 27% had repeated at least two grades. Yet very little of this information can be found in the books for any one year or in the books of any one school.

There are a number of ways in which the repeating process operates in Maragoli. On paper, 19 schools within the Location appear to have an under-enrolment of students in Standard VII. In the majority of cases these figures are deceptive. Students registered for Standard VI or not registered at all are found in Standard VII classrooms studying

for the exam that they will take the following year. Second, 42% of the Standard VII repeaters changed schools for the following year's attendance. Although headmasters may be unaware if a newcomer is actually a repeater, the informal exchange patterns between neighborhood schools are well established and can be charted if registration books from three or four local schools for several years are studied at one time. Third, the majority of repeaters remaining at their own schools change their names at registration, usually between their own last names and those of their fathers.

Headmasters prefer to accept repeaters who show potential for entry into secondary school. However, community pressure is such that repeaters are evenly distributed between all the lower grade levels. Repeating is reinforced by the success which second or third timers achieve on the C.P.E exam in comparison with fresh candidates. Out of the top 26 scores from the three schools for the 1970 exam, 69% were those of repeaters. Furthermore, repeaters made up 71% of those students from these schools accepted for aided Form I places.⁵

This pattern of repeating in Standard VII causes a chain reaction of repeating down through the lower standards. However, the backlogging pressure on the school system is somewhat reduced by the enrolment attrition between Standards IV and V. Mainly due to the jump in school fees from 60/- to 90/- between these standards, 635 parents in Maragoli in 1970 decided to stop their children at this level. On the other hand, Maragoli parents reacted strongly against the 1971 attempt to level the fees for all standards at 70/-.

Since so many children repeat classes, the age of primary school leavers is higher than students aspiring to secondary school and their headmasters are willing to admit. When questioned about their date of birth, 67% of the 139 students lowered their ages. From their answers, boys and girls averaged 15 years of age. However, an investigation of family background showed that in reality Standard VII boys and girls averaged 17 years of age. Out of all the students, only 19% were under age 16. The Kericho Conference conclusion that primary school leavers are too young for vocational training and land re-settlement does not seem to apply to

5. It should be noted that percentages given throughout this paper are based on a small sample size. They are presented within the context of one small community and may therefore, be inaccurate if applied to a much larger area.

For additional information on the general repeater problem in Kenya see Kenneth King, Primary Schools in Kenya: Some critical constraints on their effectiveness. I.D.S. Discussion Paper No. 130, 1972.

Maragoli.⁶ This long career which students spend in primary school is permitted by the lack of emphasis parents place upon agricultural production, and explains the constraints that many farmers have in cultivating their fields.

The pattern of repeating throughout the school system results in an overlap of ages in each grade. For example, one Standard VI class contained "children" from 11 to 22 years of age, while 13 year olds within the sub-location were found in Standards I through VII. Obviously, such age mixes interfere with sports, discipline, and the teaching of any subject on the syllabus.

The orientation of the entire school system is focused upon the final examination. Before C.P.E. takes place, the community holds church meetings to pray for the good grades of the students. This ceremony gives some indication of the tremendous parental pressure behind classroom preparation for the exam. Teaching is done mainly through rote-memory techniques, and non-examination subjects receive little attention. The school garden usually has the sworst looking maize crop in the village. Furthermore, Standard VII students fill out a preference list of secondary schools before taking the exam. This is the only placement service offered to school leavers. If they do not obtain a place at one of these schools, irrespective of their grades and aspirations, they feel that they have been marked as failures.

With so much invested in their children's education, and such a large reward if that education pays off, parents pay close attention to the activities of the school. Parents' meetings are usually among the best attended activities in Maragoli, politicians campaign on platforms to expand secondary school facilities, and church services include prayers for academic success. Parental desire to send as many children to school as possible, and to keep them there until they achieve entry into an aided secondary school slows down the system, blocks the implementation of an "environmentally biased" curriculum, and makes the teaching of any subject difficult. Although parents seem willing to send their children for vocational training, such courses are difficult to find, expensive, and offer no guarantee of a job. Until this situation changes, parental pressure will keep the Maragoli school system focused upon secondary school preparation.

6. James Sheffield (ed), op. cit. p.24.

EXPECTATIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF THE SCHOOL LEAVERS

How are the expectations, perceptions, and experiences of the school leavers themselves affected by the orientation of the school system and by the socio-economic setting of the community?

Table 4 POST - C.P.E. ACTIVITIES BY SEX

<u>Activities</u>	<u>Boys</u>	<u>Girls</u>	<u>Total</u>
aided secondary schools	8%	-	5%
unaided secondary schools	16	25%	19
vocational training	7	2	5
repeating	51	47	50
home	15	26	19
employed	<u>2</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>2</u>
	99%	100%	100%
	n=86	n=53	n=139

Table 4 refers to school leavers' activities one year after they took the C.P.E. examination. The Table indicates that 74% of all leavers managed to remain within the academic school system, although only 24% had done so by advancing to secondary school. Despite the slight chances girls have for entry into an aided secondary school, the construction of Harambee schools and the availability of private secondary schools in towns allowed 24% of the girls to advance their academic studies. Five girls were at local Harambee schools while eight attended private schools outside Western Province. Of the boys who attended unaided schools, 11 attended private institutions, and 10 of these are located outside the Province. Thus, 53% of those students who obtained a Form I place, did so outside Western Province. These places were found, in all cases, with the aid of kinsmen employed in the towns in which the schools are located. The high cost of attendance at these private schools was partially alleviated by the free accommodation offered the students by their relatives.

Only seven students entered vocational training programs of some sort. One student obtained a place in an aided technical school, four enrolled in private technical schools, and two apprenticed themselves to Asian garage mechanics. Six of these students entered vocational training as an obvious second choice, after at least one year of repeating Standard VII. Of the boys who remained at home, it is important to note that none had farms of their own or had undertaken any full-time entrepreneurial activity.

Table 5 POST - C.P.E. ACTIVITIES BY C.P.E. SCORES

Activities	Scores					
	0-9	10-14	15-19	20-24	25-29	30+
aided secondary school	-	-	-	-	60%	100%
unaided secondary school	9%	21%	26%	33%	-	-
vocational training	9	3	2	7	10	-
repeating	61	50	55	40	10	-
home	18	26	14	20	20	-
employed	03	-	2	-	-	-
	100%	100%	99%	100%	100%	100%
	n=33	n=38	n=42	n=15	n=10	n=1

Table 5 shows that 11 students with scores lower than 15 points were able to find places in unaided secondary schools, while 11 students with scores above 15 points remained at home. Entry into unaided secondary schools seemed more a function of parental status than students' scores. A sharp contrast in family background emerged when the group of 27 students who attended unaided secondary schools was compared with the group of 27 leavers who remained at home. In the first group, only five fathers had less than two acres of land, and 74% of the families grew cash crops. In addition, 11 fathers earned over 500/- per month. In the eight cases of fathers who were farmers or deceased, secondary school fees were paid by the students' employed elder brothers. In contrast, 21 fathers of the second group had less than two acres of land, and only 24% grew cash crops. Two fathers earned over 500/- per month. In the 16 cases of fathers who were farmers, jobless, or deceased, only four school leavers had elder employed siblings.

Extended family financial obligations are lessening in Maragoli, and school fees have become almost entirely a nuclear family affair. If secondary school education, requiring high fees, remains the major channel for earning a steady income, lines of social stratification within the community are bound to tighten.

Table 6 STUDENTS' POST - PRIMARY EXPECTATIONS

Activities	Boys	Girls	Total
aided secondary school	60%	51%	57%
unaided secondary school	13	24	17
vocational training	27	21	25
employment	-	4	1
	100%	100%	100%
	n=86	n=53	n=139

Students, themselves, are realizing the difficulties of entry into a government aided secondary school. Table 6 shows that only 57% of the 139 students anticipated obtaining a Form I place at an aided school. This percentage indicates a substantial decline in secondary school expectations as compared with comparable figures for 1966.⁷ On the other hand, 25% set their expectations upon a vocational training programme. These attitudes are in line with those of the parents, reflecting a situation in which the opportunity index for entry into an aided secondary school is low and in which secondary schooling does not ensure employment. Many students seem prepared to accept any type of further education which might lead to employment. But until such training programmes are available, they have little choice but to cling to the academic school system.

When students were asked to state their occupational preferences for jobs available to Standard VII leavers, and give reasons for their choices, 42% of the boys chose occupations on the basis of availability rather than personal benefit.

<u>Table 7</u>		<u>STUDENTS' OCCUPATIONAL CHOICE</u>	
<u>Boys</u>		<u>Girls</u>	
mechanic	48	nurse	38
carpenter	5	secretary/typist	10
tailor	2	teacher	2
driver	10	police	<u>3</u>
police	4		53
railway	2		
teacher	7		
clerk	3		
trader	1		
cash-crop farmer	<u>4</u>		
	86		

Only 10 boys chose jobs which today would be nearly impossible for a Standard VII leaver to obtain and two chose a job which could not be performed in Kakamega District. The job preferences, themselves are not new, as previous studies have indicated.⁸ They are all jobs which can be performed outside towns, and apart from police, railway and teacher, can be initiated on a self-employment basis.

7. David Koff, "Education and Employment: Perspectives of Kenya Primary Pupils", in Sheffield (ed.), op. cit., p. 408

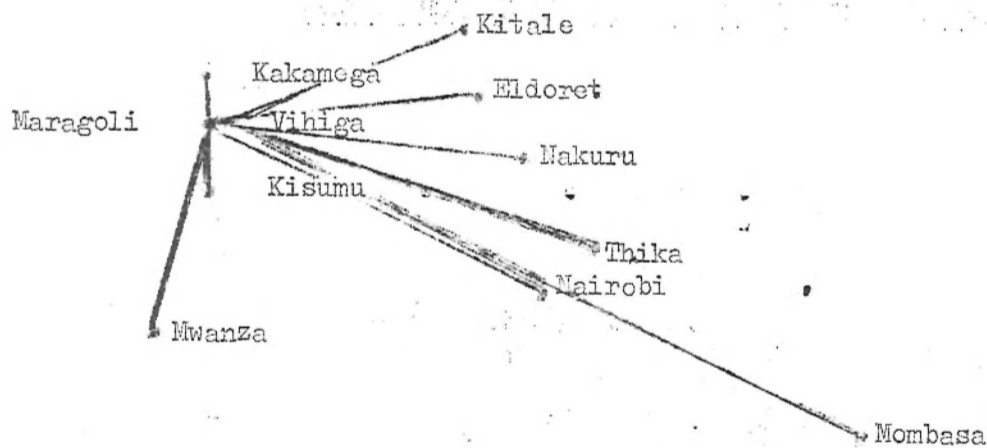
8. see papers by John Anderson, J.D. Heijnen in Sheffield (ed.), op. cit., p.413-430, 431-443.

Stated reasons for job selection which can be classified under the heading "job availability" included opportunities for getting work, self-employment possibilities, and short training periods. Within this category, these are a few representative completions to the sentence, "I would like to do this job because..."

- ... a Standard VII pupil has no good English to speak but a mechanic can use Kiswahili or simple English.
- ... in my village there isn't anyone who is a mechanic.
- ... anyone can do this job of carpenter, even if you don't go to school.
- ... when you are a mechanic, if a car has damage, you can get a private job by yourself.

These types of answers indicate an awareness of the employment situation in Kenya and a willingness of students to channel their efforts in the avenues open to them for employment. Girls, on the other hand, seemed more concerned with the benefits from the work rather than its availability. Although new employment roles have opened to them, girls are not under as severe pressure as boys to fulfill them.

When students were asked "Where will you go to find work?", 28% of the boys and 24% of the girls expected to search for employment within a 25 miles radius of their home (Vihiga, Kakamega, Kisumu). All except 11 students who expected to be away from home, planned to head in the direction of employed kinsmen.



Labour migration out of Maragoli takes the form of a chain of links to kinsmen who might provide accommodation and hospitality to job-seekers, even if they cannot aid with employment. Thus, Maragoli school leavers, as the diagram implies, fan out in the search for employment to ^{many} small towns across the country, rather than just head for the bright lights of the city.

80% of the students viewed higher education and contacts with employed friends and relatives as the best combination for finding jobs in Kenya. However, when students were asked to complete the sentence, "Young people who look for work in towns usually...", 72% perceived the job hunting process as depressing, degrading, and practically hopeless. The following selected responses indicate the force of feeling the majority of leavers have about employment searching in towns.

- ... get a lot of trouble before they get work and have nowhere to spend the night. They spend it in the bushes where water passes or in rubbish pits and this results in diseases and death.
- ... find it difficult to get work and where to sleep, what to eat, etc. And if they don't have somebody whom they know, clearly they cannot get work at all.
- ... wander about in the town searching for work and they can finish the whole day without eating.
- ... walk up and down the town and some go to offices to ask for employment. Some of them when they don't get employment begin to steal and most of them are imprisoned.
- ... don't get a job and then they just go and sit at their homes and dig their father's farm.

Yet despite this realization of job-hunting difficulties, the majority of leavers still intended to search for employment away from home. Apparently, the students' felt needs for income are so strong that they persist in what seems hopeless to many of them. To discover why students thought they needed a steady income, they were asked to complete the sentence, "I would like to earn money so that I can..."

Table 8. STUDENTS' FELT NEEDS FOR INCOME

<u>Boys</u>	<u>Needs</u>	<u>Girls</u>
41%*	buy land	6%
31	help parents	26
24	pay siblings' school fees	58
17	buy clothes	21
8	marry (buy cows)	-
7	buy taxi	11
5	become cash-crop/dairy farmer	-
5	build permanent house	6
2	have a good life	6
2	apply for training	-
-	build a shop	6
1	help the nation	6

* This question was open-ended and the responses therefore total over 100%. The percentage refers to the proportion of the total number of respondents.

Table 8 implies that students' felt needs for income strongly reflect parental attitudes towards the responsibilities of an income-earning child. Students are concerned about the welfare of their families and see the local community as the area in which to invest for their futures. In addition, the felt needs for income of many girls arise from the new roles open to women in the community. Responses such as buying taxis, building houses, buying land, and building shops indicate a sense of social and economic independence.

Students view education as a means of obtaining a steady income with which they can satisfy obligations to their families and invest for their futures in the local community. Although they perceive that their chances of obtaining an aided Form I place and/or wage employment are slight, they persist in these pursuits because few viable alternatives are open to them. Yet, if alternatives for academic education were available which were tailored to meet the needs of the community and the entrepreneurial constraints facing youngsters, both students and parents seem ready to turn their efforts in that direction.

SUMMARY

A picture of an on-going traditional life in a rural-agricultural setting is far from the socio-economic realities of Maragoli. The community's economic life is composed of a flow of labour migrants to town centers. Maragoli males exploit urban employment niches out of the necessity maintained by population density and limited land resources at home. In addition, Maragoli parents have historically looked to the school as the channel through which employment could be obtained.

Population pressure on the land, sociological changes in family organization, and the felt lack of social security in old age are among the major factors which have shaped parental attitudes towards the role of the school. Vocational and agricultural training in the past were not nullified by parental preference for elitist occupations, but rather failed because they had not been tailored to fit the needs of the community and to overcome the entrepreneurial constraints facing youngsters.

Parents see education as an instrument for providing their children with the non-agricultural employment upon which the community is dependent. Therefore, parents have made enormous financial investments in the school at the expense of other development projects in the area. Community attitudes

towards education, and the actions which these attitudes provoke, place constraints upon the operation of the school system. ~~Over-enrolment~~ in the lower standards, repeating in all grades, wide-age ranges in each class, and sole focus upon final examination preparation result in disregard for non-examination subjects and poor teaching of academic courses.

Both parents and students have realistic perceptions of the labour market and of opportunities for entrance into an aided secondary school. Furthermore, there appear to be alienation from the urban environment and a desire, on the part of school leavers, to work and invest in the local area. Although there seems to be community readiness for vocational training programmes as alternatives to secondary school entry, such programmes are difficult to find (especially for girls) and offer no guarantee of employment. Until vocational programmes are designed which offer quality training, marketing contacts, and institutional organization to overcome the constraints upon aspiring entrepreneurs, parental pressure will keep the educational system focused upon secondary school preparation.

There is a sociological fallacy in recognizing change in urban areas, while holding "rural" behavior patterns as a constant. The attitudes which parents have towards the school system are rooted in the socio-economic setting of today and are not based upon the inertia of some pre-existent traditionalism. Therefore, educational programmes ~~designed~~ to meet the assumed needs of areas pre-categorized in the planners' minds would seem to have little chance of success.