

Using Family Histories to Study Inheritance and Poverty Exits in Kenya

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Unstructured narrative interviews with members of a family

- Interviews centred on a 'contact person', a respondent to a 10-year household panel study
- Households categorized as 'ascenders' from poverty, with a contrast group of 'descender' households
- Multiple interviews across gender & generation

Inheritance in these rural areas is the inheritance of land (plus *debts*)

- Traditional practices still dominate inheritance, the effect of which is that inheritance runs almost solely along male lines (but women do have some rights)
- Tradition/the Clan might ease the cross-generational burden of debts
- However, while a shamba can be a refuge or a fallback, without additional or alternative sources of income it can be a poverty trap.

Effects of the legal regularization of land title

- A considerable scramble when land titles were regularized
- *Ad hoc* appropriation of land by 'relatives' ruled out
- **Danger of the progressive sub-division of land into ever smaller plots as subsequent generations inherit**
- In effect, families become 'nuclearized'

Instability gives opportunities for expanding land holdings

At time of *Uhuru*

- New land opened up
- Large farms were broken up (initially via cooperatives)

Ethnic strife provides opportunities as well

Additional features of note

- The inheritance of attitudes and 'habitual' modes of behaviour across generations, especially entrepreneurial attitudes
- All interviews mentioned school fees and deteriorating infrastructure (esp. roads) as the main things that hold them back
- The pressure on women who are forced to become *de facto* heads of households when their husbands lack the capacity