



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Review of Hunt D.: 'The Impending crisis in Kenya: the case for land reform, 1984'

Meilink, H.A.

Citation

Meilink, H. A. (1987). Review of Hunt D.: 'The Impending crisis in Kenya: the case for land reform, 1984'. *Development And Change*, 18(2), 363-365. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/8996>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [Leiden University Non-exclusive license](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/8996>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

April '87

Diana Hunt, *The Impending Crisis in Kenya: The Case for Land Reform*. Hampshire, England, and Brookfield, Vermont: Gower, 1984. viii + 322 pp. \$41.00 hardback.

Kenya's most pressing development problem is how to provide productive employment to a very rapidly growing number of people. According to demographic estimates, there will be a doubling of the population in the 1980-2000 period, reaching a total of 35 million, and the number of new labour force entrants in that period is estimated to be many millions more than in the twenty years prior to 1980. This disturbing problem of how to absorb a fast-growing labour force into an economy with a substantial proportion of people already living in poverty constitutes a great challenge to policy makers.

Evidently, the agricultural sector is to play a crucial role in accommodating future labour supplies, despite the fact that the total area of potential good agricultural land is small and land-man ratios are already decreasing rapidly. In several studies carried out in recent years, this problem has been analysed extensively and some far-reaching policy changes were suggested (ILO, 1972; Tidrick [World Bank] 1979; Livingstone [ILO, 1981] 1981).

Hunt's study is also concerned with Kenya's labour absorption problem and, in correspondence with the title of the book, - *The Impending Crisis* - arrives at a pessimistic conclusion. As to the methods applied and the data used, the author draws heavily on Livingstone's (1981) ILO report but questions some of its assumptions and policy recommendations.

After examining the potentials of employment (and income) growth in different branches of the economy, a generally known conclusion is reached. The non-agricultural sectors (e.g. modern urban industry, rural and urban 'informal' activities, public works programmes and rural small-scale industry) all taken together are likely to offer jobs to only a minority of the future labour force entrants. Therefore agriculture is to provide the lion's share of employment needs.

The book proceeds to analyse the scope for employment creation and poverty reduction within the agricultural sector given two different options: (a) the existing patterns of, and trends in, land distribution (no land reform) and (b) a policy of substantial land redistribution (the case for land reform).

Ways to increase agricultural production and employment without land reform include enlarging the area under irrigation, drainage of valley bottoms and conversion of forests and pastures into agricultural uses. Furthermore, cropping patterns can be shifted towards crops having a higher value and using more labour per hectare. Land use may also be intensified through adoption of innovations by farmers and the resulting yield increases may induce an additional demand for labour. Many of these possibilities are incorporated in Kenya's past and current 'smallholder farm development programmes'. In particular, the Fourth Five Year Plan (1979-83) puts increased emphasis on alleviating rural poverty through these programmes.

Hunt provides a critical and detailed examination of 'the capacity of these programmes' to raise farm incomes (in particular of the poor) and/or increase wage employment. In addition, much attention is paid to possible farm innovation 'suited to the resource constraints of poor households'.

It is this part of the book which is highly recommendable. The author's knowledge of the determinants of resource allocation in peasants' households, and of poor households' responses to recommended agricultural innovations, is impressive. Most of this information was obtained during a case-study of the economic behaviour of

Kenya's (near) future. In particular for the political establishment (with vested interests in land properties), the price of 'inaction' might be very high.

REFERENCES

- International Labour Organisation (ILO) (1972) *Employment, Incomes and Equality: A Strategy for Increasing Productive Employment in Kenya*. Geneva: ILO.
- Tidrick, G. (World Bank) (1979) 'Kenya: Issues in Agricultural Development'. Draft. Published in *World Bank; Kenya-Growth and Structural Change*, Volume II. Washington DC: World Bank.
- Livingstone, I. (1981) *Rural Development, Employment and Incomes in Kenya*. Addis Ababa: Jobs and Skills Programme for Africa (JASPA).

Henk A. Meilink
Leiden, The Netherlands

Martin Godfrey, *Global Unemployment: The New Challenge to Economic Theory*. Brighton: Wheatsheaf Books, 1986. xiv + 257 pp. £22.50 hardback; £8.95 paperback.

Martin Godfrey's objectives in this stimulating and (no doubt to some) provocative book are two-fold. Firstly, he reviews a variety of theories of the nature, causes and consequences of unemployment and underutilization of labour in both developed and less developed capitalist economies. He identifies a number of different schools of thought — classical, neo-classical and Keynesian, 'pioneering' and later development economics, and Marxist and neo-Marxist perspectives — and presents clear and concise surveys of often inaccessible literature. His second objective is to relate these theories to and evaluate them in the context of recent changes in the global economy. He focuses attention in particular on the increasing location of industrial production for the global market in LDCs, the use of LDC migrant labour in developed capitalist economies and, of more recent origin, the growth of unemployment in the latter group of economies to levels and rates reminiscent of the 1930s. Godfrey argues that these changes, inter alia, highlight two inadequacies of current theorizing: it is largely confined to the discussion of unemployment at the national rather than the international level, and it continues to assume that unemployment is a short-run problem in the developed economy and a long-run problem in the less developed economy. Such convergence in theorizing as there has been has 'largely taken the form of the export of static neoclassical theory from North to South' (p. 208). Godfrey does not view this as a particularly helpful development and argues instead for a change in direction in the theorization of unemployment:

Such an alternative would need to be dynamic and long-run, with capital accumulation and growth at its centre, rather than static and short-run. It would need to be concerned with rapid structural change rather than equilibrium . . . it would need to be global rather than national in the reach of its analysis . . . (p. 233)

poor households in Mbere (Embu district) back in 1972–74. Results of this study (although rather dated) are summarized in the book and have been valuable for policy makers. For example, although land is generally considered the limiting factor in increasing agricultural production, it was found that labour bottlenecks, at particular times during the year, may equally hamper production growth. Risk aversion has high priority in all low-income households, and this makes such households hesitant in accepting a shift in the allocation of labour time towards new farm enterprises (e.g. cash crop cultivation), possibly at the cost of losing a part of the subsistence production. The significance of existing labour constraints is often ignored in recommended innovations. Hunt shows that successful adoption of new crops and/or new farming practices by low-income smallholders (by far the majority of Kenya's farmers) requires the fulfilment of a few stringent conditions: low initial demands on land, capital as well as labour; low risk; a relatively speedy return; and, finally, the output should be of the type which can either be consumed at home or sold in the market. Based on these adoption requirements, Hunt examined the wide range of innovations recommended in the various rural development programmes (for hybrid maize, tea, coffee, pyrethrum, potatoes, cassava, milk, pigs and poultry) and concluded that with the exception of cassava, conditions for widespread adoption are not fulfilled. The main cause is to be found in the already very narrow resource base (for providing a living) for a large number of agricultural households. This leads the author to the main argument of the book: in order to create sufficient employment and income opportunities in the near future, a change in the pattern of land distribution is a necessary condition. Again, in this last chapter (the case for land reform) the reader is offered a painstaking and lucid discussion of the relevant issues (e.g. the arguments against subdivision of large farms and the labour use effects of redistribution). Not surprisingly, the conclusion is in favour of land reform. It is convincingly argued that land redistribution results in higher output per hectare and more intensive use of labour in combination with decreased use of costly modern inputs per hectare and is therefore an attractive policy option.

However, these conclusions do not differ from those drawn by Livingstone (1981) and Tidrick (1979). These writers have also shown the positive impact on labour absorption resulting from a policy of land reform. The difference is that Hunt advocates a much more radical policy of land redistribution because, in her opinion, a moderate land reform (as proposed by Livingstone) would fail to make a significant contribution to absorbing the new labour entrants.

As to the possibility of subdividing Kenya's land, there is also no disagreement. Large mixed farms (not yet de facto subdivided), the so-called gap-farms (twenty to fifty hectares) and settlement scheme farms are all categories of farms offering these possibilities. Even within the smallholder sector, there is room for further subdivision.

The central question is whether or not a radical land reform is a sine qua non for sufficient labour supply absorption. The answer depends, to a large extent, on the numerical value of the assumptions made when estimating the quantitative impact of land redistribution in terms of employment and output increases. These assumptions concern, among others, the possible ceiling of subdivision, the average labour input per hectare, land fertility, cropping patterns, output value and the speed of adoption of new technologies. Clearly, Livingstone and also Tidrick are more 'optimistic' in estimating agriculture's absorption capacity in the case of a moderate land reform than Hunt is. But it is beyond doubt that Hunt's book convincingly demonstrates that Kenya's policy makers and politicians have every reason to be very worried about