1. Background

This article focuses on khat production and its trade, (particularly in northern Kenya), its background, magnitude and structure. The study is based on fieldwork in the area during 1973 and 1974 and some follow-up visits there and in neighbouring countries. The "present tense" in the paper normally refers to a situation some five years ago which might have changed.

The perspective is that of the town of Isiolo (see Map 1), which in many official reports is called "the gate to the north". This town is a trade link between the agricultural part of Kenya and the north. It emerged during the beginning of this century as an administration post and a centre for long-distance trade. This was followed, in the 1920's, by a settlement of Somali traders, most of them former World War I soldiers, and Meru employees migrating from the neighbouring district to the south. The most important trade northwards has consisted basically of agricultural produce, especially maize meal and khat for consumption throughout northern Kenya.

Miraa (1) (the KiSwahili for khat, Catha edulis Forsk) is produced in great quantities in the Nyambeni Hills, northeast of Mount Kenya (see Map 2). It is sold both within Kenya and exported on a large scale to neighbouring countries such as Somalia, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zaire and Zambia as well as to Arab countries in the Middle East. Khat from the Nyambeni Hills is among the very best brands to be found (Bernard 1972: 130). The tree, usually between four and ten metres in height is preferably kept under similar ecological conditions as coffee in Nyambeni Hills. Young twigs of the tree (15-30 cm) growing directly from the trunk or the branches, are picked every 28 days and sold in bundles. The bark (and on good quality khat also the leaves) are chewed as a stimulant.

Regular khat trade to Isiolo began in the 1930's as the town grew. Somali merchants dominated the trade in town and to the north while Igembe and Tigania traders, coming from the Lare and Kangeta areas, transported khat from their home markets to Isiolo, often illegally by foot at night. Competition between traders of these two subgroups mounted into open hostilities in the 1940's causing the Igembe traders to shift to Gachuru and leaving the Isiolo trade to the Tigania traders. This division still holds. It makes Isiolo the only khat market in Kenya where Igembe traders are not in majority.

The trade was declared illegal in 1945. From this time on trading became restricted for the private traders and khat had again to be smuggled. During 1956-59, when the restricted consumption had become legal, the trade was monopolised by a farmers' cooperative, the Meru Traders Society, whose official goal was to keep prices high and protect the interests of the farmers against middle-men. However, this society was mismanaged. When it went bankrupt in 1959, the trade was legalised for private khat traders and prices went down. Heavy rains in 1960-61 made transportation very difficult. Khat had to be transported either on bicycles or by foot. This situation was reflected in great price increase. The destroyed
bridges were still not repaired in 1962, which meant that there was still no possibility of road transport to the towns of Moyale, Mandera, Marsabit and Wajir (see Map 1). Some of the affluent Somali traders in Isiolo then began to transport khat by air to these places, purchasing khat in Isiolo for 3 Kenyan Shillings per bundle and selling it for 12 Ksh per bundle. The aeroplane made three trips per week each time carrying 30,000 bundles.

The local khat trade in Isiolo was administered by five Somali merchants, who held licences to purchase khat for the Meru Traders Society. They also bought illegally from private traders. The 1960's saw changes in the trade, though, to a great extent due to the secessionist war during the early independence. During the war period the stimulant was ascribed strategic value caused by its property of limiting hunger and thirst. Once again khat was declared illegal in Isiolo and north thereof. Again, smuggling started, but this time under severe conditions. As the Meru people generally identified themselves with the new government, there was a strong social sanction against smuggling khat. Also transportation became dangerous. If smugglers were found in the bush, they risked being shot without warning by either side in the war.

Following Kenya's independence, the secessionist was began in the north and lasted for three to five years inflicting fundamental changes on the inhabitants of the Arch (Hjort 1979). Depending largely on ethic affiliations people were affected by the war to varying degrees, and the wealth hierarchy was to some extent shaken up. Most of the important Somali traders had to leave town. A high-ranking official, himself a Tigania Meru, urged people from his home area to migrate to Isiolo and take advantage of the departure of the Somali traders. The result was a new wave of Meru migration, this time from the Tigania area. Much of the khat trade which before was in the hands of Kenyan Somali traders shifted to Meru traders. This change also concerned the short-distance trade to other centres in northern Kenya. Today, Meru are firmly established both in the short-distance retail and market trade in Isiolo town as well as in the khat trade.

From the end of the 1960's until now the only hindrance of the khat trade are the County Councils' demands for cess and licence fees. The producers in Nyambeni Hills compete on the market and usually sell to middle-men. One reason for this situation is the fact that few farmers specialize in khat production alone. Since it is labour-extensive (see below) many farmers who live in suitable areas keep a few trees without regarding khat as a prime source of income. This fact in combination with a fear for corruption within the cooperative movement makes them reluctant to coordinate the sales of their khat produce.

2. Khat Production in the Nyambeni Hills
Khat is one of the most important cash crops in the Meru District. It is possibly safe to say that it is even the most important one within Nyambeni Hills. Official statistics both for production and trade are unreliable since many people try to avoid taxes and other costs involved. According to the Annual Report from the Meru District Agricultural Officer, 1968, the Nyambeni farmers traded khat for about 6.2 million KSh in 1968 (Bernard 1972: 131). From this and earlier Annual Reports an average payment per bundle of 0.15-0.17 KSh can be calculated for the period 1966-68. Ten years later the payment averaged around 0.30 KSh (calculated from Kenya 1980: 21). Considering the devaluations of the KSh this means that very little change has occurred in the price level for the producer.

Bernard estimates that khat farmers gained over 2,000 KSh per acre in 1968. This calculation is based on an estimate that only 3,000 acres are grown. This estimate must be very rough since appropriate measurements are difficult to carry out. Land fragmentation is great and the trees are grown on a small scale mixed with other kinds of crops. In comparison with coffee growing in the Meru District, which gave a return of 1,543 KSh per acre in 1968 (a calculation based on figures presented by Bernard 1972: 122), the return per acre is about 30% higher for khat than for coffee. This calculation differs widely from Sandberg's statement from roughly the same period that the return per acre for khat was about three times that of coffee in Igembe (Sandberg 1969: iii, p. 22). Looking at the current Meru District Development Plan (Kenya 1980: 21) all figures deviate from the above information. Here, only 800 ha (1500 acres) are used for khat production. The cash income earned by the district from coffee was claimed to be twenty times that of khat, while tea and khat were on the same magnitude in 1979 (loc. cit.). The return per acre becomes 18,283 KSh for khat to be compared with that of coffee, 14,947 KSh. If these figures are correct the return per acre should be 22% higher for khat than for coffee.

All these differences and uncertainties in the statistics reflect the difficulties in obtaining reliable data. One point is clear, however, khat production is more profitable than coffee. To this one has to add the fact that khat harvesting is less labour consuming since the twigs are picked gradually. The coffee harvest periods require greater organisation. This difference can often be attractive for the farmer who may wish to distribute labour inputs evenly over the year. Owing to the topography of the Nyambeni Hills the growing conditions for khat vary greatly, even locally, although the general conditions have to resemble those for coffee. These differences are represented in the names of khat of various qualities. There are a number of brands which the consumer expert has no difficulty to distinguish. For example, kangeta and fare, two appreciated brands, are grown in the vicinity of the two neighbouring centres Kangeta and Lare; see Map 2. Two more could be mentioned, the best and the worst. Giza is the most toxic shoot, with no woody stem and completely red in colour. The whole twig is consumed. It is hardly exported outside the farming area. I have heard that its name, "darkness", is derived from the
secret and illegal nightly trade in the 1930’s. Majani, “leaves”, in contrast, are woody shoots with big leaves and little toxic effect. This brand is avoided by the expert consumer in Nyambeni Hills and vicinity, but is sold to other consumers with less opportunities to choose between different brands, or with lesser knowledge. A lot of secrecy is involved with the different brands.

Most of the khat produced in the Nyambeni Hills comes from small-scale farmers who grow a few trees in one part of their farms. They either bring the shoots to a local market to sell to regular middle-men. The production of khat is high and constant from October to May or June.

Prices go low during this season. In 1973 Giza of the very best quality would fetch 2 KSh* per bundle for the farmer at a local Meru market. Different kinds of majani gave as little as 0.20 KSh while kangeta gave 0.75-1.00 KSh per bundle. During June-October when costs are high and production low, the farmer could obtain at least 2.00 KSh for kangeta, while giza fetched 4.00 KSh in 1973. Even though these prices may not be realistic today they indicate the general shift in price levels between seasons and a fairly great variation between the different brands.

The fact that khat is not storable characterizes the trade. Once harvested, decisions concerning the trade must be made rapidly and the distribution network function smoothly. This situation further encourages the development of a middle-man system since trade requires a degree of expertise. The farmer easily becomes exploited (Sandberg 1969:11) Petty traders often contact the farmer directly and are able to cut the prices too. After negotiations the buyers may even bring their people (mainly relatives) to harvest the twigs for them.

3. Long-distance and Local Trade

Khat is traded in bundles of varying sizes. The better qualities, such as giza and kangeta, are packed in small bundles of four shoots. Ten of these small bundles are tied together and make up one bundle. This is the minimum quantity that is traded. Twenty such bundles make up one kilo (approximately one kilogramme), tied in two parts and wrapped in banana leaves in order to remain fresh. Ten kilos packed together constitute one big bundle.

The difficulties to store khat generate trade networks which have to be extremely efficient. The shoots have to be transported from the producer to the consumer in a few days' time. Even with
access to refrigeration the time period is hardly more than a week. This means that high costs are involved especially for the long-distance trader. The khat for export is transported in specially-built Land Rovers to Nairobi of Mombasa and flown from there. Under these circumstances the price increase is tremendous. If we take the example of the trade to centres in northern Kenya by car or lorry and compare with the prices fetched in Isiolo, there is roughly a 100% increase up to Garissa, 200% in Mandera and 250% in Moyale. When air-freight is involved the level becomes extremely high. During the high-cost season in 1982, I saw lare in Mogadishu (Somalia) which cost almost 200 SoSh per bundle. It had been partially air-freighted from Mombasa, bought there three days earlier for 2.00 KSh according to my informant. Prices in Baidoa in Somalia, en route to Kenya, though, were considerably lower, 120 SoSh.

I shall touch only lightly upon the international khat trade in this paper. A few observations could, however, be made in passing.

(1) High costs and great risks invite illegal activities (smuggling and non-licenced trade). It may under such circumstances be ethically sensitive to map the international khat trade. (2) The efficiency of the trade can again be illustrated from Mogadishu were Kenyan, Yemeni and Ethiopian khat could be obtained (in this order of preference). (3) The brands exported from Nyambeni Hills seem to be primarily kangeta, lare and majani (or qualities chose to it). Giza is generally consumed locally, possibly because these watery shoots have a shorter storage capacity. Giza is generally consumed locally, possibly because these watery shoots have a shorter storage capacity. Giza is to my knowledge also the only brand with fixed prices.

In order to somewhat elaborate on the costs involved in local trade we may examine the trade route from the markets in Nyambeni Hills to Isiolo. Again, the figures refer to the 1973-74 situation.

Transportation costs per kilo were 1.50 KSh from Kangeta to Isiolo by matatu (a kind of taxi). To this should be added different costs for taxes and licences amounting to 2.50 KSh per kilo. The total cost per kilo for transportation etc. thus became 4.00 KSh or 0.20 KSh per bundle. To this must be added one licence for transporting khat from Meru to Isiolo, costing 180.00 KSh/year, and one annual trading licence in Isiolo for 250.00 KSh. The normal rent of one shop at the market was 70.00 KSh per month, a cost often shared by several traders. A typical arrangement for traders to work in pairs so that one would go and buy khat at the Meru markets while the other one would trade at the Isiolo market. It becomes difficult to add all the costs together to calculate a minimum price increase per bundle since the turnover of khat traders fluctuates widely. However, costs and indirect taxations amount to quite a considerable amount.
4. Structures and Seasonality of the Khat Trade

While the Meru khat traders are well-informed about the situation among the producers in Nyambeni Hills, the Somali traders are far better informed about current demands in the various markets throughout northern Kenya. The major reason for this difference is, of course, that the respective networks of contacts extend in various directions depending on where "home" is. But there is also a structural difference in the networks when comparing the local Meru and Somali affluent traders. The former have localised contacts which are based on neighbourhood (and, hence, usually subclan) relations. The latter are members of segmentary kinship networks which are not localised. One implication is having a relative and informant almost everywhere.

The khat traders at the Isiolo market, however, are nowadays almost invariably from Tigania Meru. The Meru Merchants can, through their own contacts in the Nyambeni Hills, monopolise major parts of the trade chain, from the producer to the local market to the markets in Isiolo or Gachuru. They spend most of their time in the market place, sleeping at night-time in their shops and helping each other with economic expenses if necessary.

Some of the petty traders, though, are Borana and Somali women who act as middle-men between the Meru kiosk owners and the Borana and Somali customers. This trade has developed after the secessionist war. The women started trading khat, thus entering a new and formerly prohibited sector out of economic necessity. Their trade is carried out on a fairly small scale; they purchase a few bundles from a market trader in order to sell in town or, more often, borrow khat on credit and pay back after it has been sold. Many husbands do not approve of their wives trading khat since it implies a socially too extrovert occupation. Therefore, most of the Borana and Somali women who trade in khat are not married. Only in a few cases women traders have made large-scale business careers in the khat trade. Those who succeed have invariable established their own niche with regular customers, e.g. bringing the khat from the market to some other small place, while adding other items like cloth, perfume, etc. to the trade.

Trade with Turkana customers, who have recently started to consume khat, does not require middle-men for the Meru traders. Tigania and Turkana call each other "brothers" and have a common myth about their origin. This mythical relation is something often referred to in price negotiations. All twelve traders with a licence at the Isiolo market in 1974 were from Tigania. Out of these, seven came from the Karama Sublocation (in Muthara Location). In September
1973, when prices were high and the volume of the trade low, they had employed a total of twelve assistants, nine of whom belonged to the same subclan. Five of these were classificatorily brothers to the licence-holders. The remaining five traders with a licence also came from Muthara or from Kianjai (both Locations in the Tigania Division). They had employed five assistants altogether, three of the same subclan, plus one Borana and one Turkana. Apart from these traders, there were thirteen others working (officially as assistants) in their kiosks without holding a trading licence. In all cases but two they were of the same subclan as the licence holder.

Obviously, kinship is an important aspect of a khat trader, being significant even down to a subclan level. Regular traders are, if possible to manage economically, obliged to take on such assistants who can refer to a close kinship relation and hence in a position to demand, help according to Meru customs. Assistants then get a client status vis-à-vis the licence holders: they are not paid a salary, but their expenses are met and they are given a bonus when the trade is successful. If a trader faces a loss, this is covered by himself only and does not involve the assistants.

There are two major reasons for young Meru males to enter the khat trade. One is the demand for land in the Nyambeni Hills which leads to land fragmentation and tends to "push" people out of the area (Sandberg 1971: 75). Landlessness especially hurts younger brothers in a family. The other reason is the prevalent attitude among educated people preferring white-collar jobs to subsistence of even cash-crop farming. The status of being a trader is in between that of being an employee and that of a farmer. Most boys remain only for a short period as khat trade assistants. But a few continue and the future traders are found among these assistants who learn the tricks of the trade.

When the prices are low (October to May), a greater number of persons try to make a living out of the khat trade. They can then afford to purchase khat cheaply either directly from the producer or from a local middle-man at a Meru market, and try their luck to transport it for sale to Isiolo. When the prices go up (June to October) this kind of low-investment trade is no longer viable, and many temporary traders quit the business.

In order to illustrate the seasonality in the khat trade we can look at the case of Mr. Mugambi. He was one of the khat traders at the Isiolo market who maintained a large business. During the period February to July he kept a daily record of people who were working in his kiosk at the market. The record covers the presence of the owner, his permanent and temporary assistants and other traders who rent the right to trade in the shop on a day-to-day basis. The period was selected so as to check particularly
what changes occur around the end of May or beginning of June when the high production season ceases and prices go up. During the period Mr. Mugambi had two trustworthy permanent assistants. They took turns to trade at the market and purchase khat from the markets in the Nyambeni Hills. Up to the beginning of May another assistant was employed temporarily. He stopped working on May 9.

In the following table, the average number of persons per day in the shop and the number of independent traders have been calculated on a monthly basis (the owner is excluded):

The total number of persons working in the shop went down when the low-cost season was over. This was also the case for independent traders, in accordance with the earlier analysis. The example demonstrates how a reduction in the number of independent traders occurs when prices go high. They then have to adjust to the situation in the new season and invest more money when buying khat in Meru. Those who cannot afford this or who are not willing to risk their capital have to leave, at least temporarily. The average number of persons working for Mr. Mugambi's business also went down between February and July. This reflects the other aspect of the new season; the volume of the trade goes down at the same time as prices go up. Mr. Mugambi's business had a turnover of about 500 KSh a day, but with great difference in volume, during both seasons. In the high production season the number of bundles traded were almost ten times the number in the low production season.

5. Khat Traders' Careers

Those traders in the town of Isiolo who have established themselves within the last 10 to 15 years have more often than not started out in the khat business. As I have already indicated, this trade, if carried out on a large scale, involves great risks. Therefore, the successful Meru khat traders have invested their profits in retail shops, in hotels and in cattle in addition to farms "back home". A successful trader could theoretically make a net profit of around 15,000 KSh during the high-cost season of 1973 from one delivery of a single Land Rover load, granted that he succeeded to sell the entire load (Hjort 1974: 40).

Attracted by the small initial investment in local khat trade, scores of young men try their luck especially during the high production period, motivated by a situation where no alternatives exist, but with limited hopes of success.
The business career of Mr. M'Itutu presents a case in the category of traders who take great risks. He entered the khat business in 1971 when he had raised money by buying a leopard skin from a person whom he met in a bar in Kianjai. When this person had got sufficiently drunk, M'Itutu paid for the skin with small Ugandan notes. He then rushed off to Isiolo with the skin, sold it there and returned to the person he had cheated to pay him the agreed upon sum before a police report had been filed. With the money M'Itutu bought khat at Kangeta, transported it to Isiolo and managed to sell all of it at a considerable profit. About one year later he went completely bankrupt after having failed to sell three consecutive deliveries of khat. Then again he managed to raise money by stealing a load of khat from another trader who had hidden it with the intention of smuggling it into the market at night-time in order to avoid cess. M'Itutu tried to "make a pile" when he picked up rumours that deliveries had been very poor to a town for north in Kenya. He borrowed as much money as he could, rented a car, filled it with khat and took off. Upon arrival, his local contact suggested that he should smuggle it into town without paying cess, which he tried. However, he was reported to the police by this person and was caught. The entire load was confiscated until he had paid a heavy fine. As M'Itutu was unable to put forth the requested sum and the whole load dried up. He had remained without money for two weeks until the police relented and helped him return.

These efforts of M'Itutu illustrate some of the methods used in the khat trade and the kinds of risks involved. A quick success in the trade remains a fiction for almost all involved. Although the trade has the reputation of a road to "quick money", this can only come true with a thorough knowledge of the trade coupled with quick and reliable information about the alternative markets. It therefore becomes not only a matter of skill in learning the tricks of the trade, but also a matter of having the right contacts. It was essential for M'Itutu to have local contacts, enabling him both to sell the leopard skin and move into the khat business. A successful trader must be kept informed about fluctuations in consumer prices as well as about variations in the production within the Nyambeni Hills.

Different kind of strategy to that of Mr. M'Itutu is to try to maintain regular and steady but lower income as illustrated in the case of Mr. M'Kibiri. He had been in the khat business for many years. His return during one month in 1974 was about 800 KSh. Out of this, his one regular assistant usually would get one fourth. Thus remaining for M'Kibiri was an income equal to that of a skilled worker or, say, a driver.

Apart from the regular traders in the market in Isiolo in 1974, about twenty women of both Borana and Somali origin were engaged in the khat business. They would bring their khat in a basket and sit around at the market or on the verandahs along the road, and sometimes look for customers in the residential areas. Their daily turnover could average 25 KSh. Out of this, some 10 KSh was used for purchasing the stock. Their monthly income could thus become 400-450 KSh, i.e. not
too far off from that of Mr. M’Kibiri.

Since a khat trader is much exposed to contacts with male customers, married women and unmarried girls are often forbidden by their husbands or fathers to venture into this trade. Selling khat taints the reputation of a woman slightly, and a "righteous" husband may disapprove of his wife associating with khat traders. But for single women the trade represents a major way of survival, giving a somewhat secure income. Many of the female khat traders are socially very popular personalities, having many male and female friends. They are also in great demand as second or third wives, although they seldom remain in long-lasting marital unions. Within the female sphere they are often socially influential and may hold religious positions demanding respect. The khat trade thus makes unmarried urban life a realistic alternative for women who resent the restrictions of married life, and it is considered both more respectable and less ephemeral as a secure source of living than prostitution.

6. The Social Importance of Khat

Although the primary purpose of this paper is to present production and trade aspects of khat in Kenya, I should mention something about its social importance. The topic of khat easily arouses strong emotions, a fact which can be ascribed to at least three reasons; a socially differentiated access to the drug, the variety of functions and the amount of money involved.

Khat consumption has been prohibited or limited from time to time. For one thing, these changes are related to whether khat is considered a narcotic or not, and to the lobbying strength of influential traders. For another, since feelings of hunger and thirst are blocked by khat, it is considered to have strategic importance from the military viewpoint (as an example trade was prohibited in Isiolo during the secessionist was in the 1960’s).

There are also other strong socio-political reasons for limiting khat consumption. To chew khat is time-consuming and costly apart from its health risks, and effects the economy of the entire household. The fact that this aspects is important was shown by the demonstration of Somali women in Isiolo, in 1962, against their husbands’ high level of khat consumption. The demonstrators claimed that the husbands brought poverty to the family besides the fact that they became sexually inactive. There must have been strong sentiments involved to convince these women to come out in the streets and demonstrate. Another economical question that one can ask is whether money is also drawn from sources other than the household budget. It is
a safe guess that there is at least some connection between khat consumption and corruption.

The consumption pattern of khat varies little both culturally and individually. Businessmen and truck-drivers, for example, can often be seen chewing khat more or less continuously in order to remain awake and with a sharp mind. Night-watchmen, usually with a day-time employment as well, are constantly chewing khat to stay awake. Students when sitting for exams even prefer to eat khat in order to achieve maximum effect. Local sheiks prefer to chew khat when reciting the Qur-an so as to stay alert. The list could go on and on.

But apart from such utility-oriented consumption of khat, there is a social life dimension to it among Borana, Meru and Somali inhabitants of the town. Khat consumption has usually been restricted to men. Traditionally women have been prohibited from consuming khat, but, today, its use among women is gradually spreading.

If one visits a home, it is usually considered good manners to bring a bundle of khat. However, one would not find such an elaborate social life linked with khat parties as in Yemen. (Cf. Gerholm 1977: 176FF). In an Isiolo khat party, a group of men usually "regulars", will chew khat after lunch, whether they have intended to meet over a specific issue or merely for pleasure. Every participant contributes his share of bundles, placed in the middle of the group. These meetings could take place at home or outdoors under a tree (away from the turmoil of the town). Talking goes easy, one enjoys listening to music and remembering events of the past and day-dreaming about the future. Sunset marks a point where the participants can either break up in order to go home or agree to purchase more khat in order to continue the talk indoors until the late evening. There are only minor cultural variations in this pattern. For example, the Meru tend to use sugar, soft drinks and peppermint sweets as extra with the khat, whereas Borana and Somali drink sweet and spiced tea with their khat. In all cases heavy cigarette smoking is involved. The invitation to a khat party has to come from the senior man of the group. Other than that there are no symbols for social rank in the party.

The ranks of consumers among affluent and politically dominant groups and the producers, are, today, being swelled by women and members of other ethnic groups such as the Turkana. Today, Borana and Somali women may occasionally meet and consume khat. Since there is a stigma involved for women to chew khat, the consumption either tends to be more individualised or is carried out in connection with female rituals. Khat plays a small role in some of the Ayana cult activities (a Muslim tariqa, "from the bush" as religious leaders claim).
In the new pattern of use which has emerged in Isiolo, one can see a correlation between khat consumption and poverty. Khat has shifted from being solely a means among the affluent classes to manifest and appreciate their position, in the impoverished person's symbolic efforts to manage his situation in the multi-ethnic urban confusion. One may call this escapeism. Whatever the term, the question must be asked whether new consumer categories will appear as poverty increases. Certainly they can be reached more efficiently with the improved transportation that modern technology offers. In these respects khat consumption is not a "time-less" phenomenon but a product of today's general development process.

7. Summary and Conclusion

The khat produced in the Nyambeni Hills of Meru District in Kenya is much sought-after both within the country and abroad. In spite of the fact that this district is one of the best coffee-producing districts, the prime cash crop is actually khat especially in the northern part of it. However, this does not always show in official production statistics. The khat trees are grown on a fairly small scale by the "ordinary farmer" who sells the twigs through middlemen to local markets. There, they are purchased both by local traders and by representatives of internationally traders. My prime focus has been on the former category.

The khat trade is highly seasonal. When the trees produce few twigs (June to October) the shortage causes prices to rise. Accordingly, prices go down when the production volume grows sharply. The position of the khat trader is vulnerable because of the short storage time of khat, about three days without refrigeration if wrapped in banana leaves.

These two factors, i.e. seasonality and storage problems, have a direct impact on the khat trade. The local traders can be grouped into different categories: Traders who employ a "safe" strategy with low return from their business, as a supplement to other income (female traders are found in this category), especially during the low cost season, and traders who take a chance with possible high returns at stake (sometimes linked to criminality).

On the consumer side, new categories have emerged and the demand seems to be increasing. A new social issue has opened up in the urban context, filled as it is with insecurity and poverty. In rituals concerning the urban poor, the drug plays a small but significant part. This consumption pattern supplements the historical one where married and affluent men would
spend some time together, contemplating over past and future events.

This article has been quite specific, limiting itself as it does primarily to local trade and production aspects in northern Kenya. The information given is accordingly more hazardous to generalise. On the other hand there may be a few aspects of high significance on the local scene, or questions emerging from it, which might be lost in a larger perspective and which should be accounted for if we are to grasp the dynamics of the khat production systems. Therefore it might be appropriate to conclude this presentation with a few general points of socio-economic implications from this case study.

(1) The high price levels mean that the consumers are great spenders.

(2) The expansion of the trade in khat will cause increases in the number of consumers and also changes the patterns of use. There are two aspects:

a. Socially; new consumer categories may emerge (i/ impoverished, ii/ women, iii/ young people and iv/ consumers from new ethnic groups)

b. Spatially; extended trade networks through improved infrastructure or increased trade volumes

(3) Concerning the trade: is the trade structure generally such that it will be dominated by middlemen and lead to low producer prices? Are the taxations on trade efficient or is there also an illegal trade?

(4) Concerning the production: is there a competition generally between khat production and growing other crops? For example: Are there divided opinions within the family? Will khat production lessen the interest in production improvements?
NOTES

1. Miraa, the KiSwahili word for Catha edulis Forsk., is in this paper replaced with khat, the term used for the ICAA conference.

2. The difference is not as great as it may seem comparing the ratios, however. As Dr. Getahun has pointed out the superiority of khat returns increases in more marginal areas.

3. One may note that even these low prices are quite decent when compared with the official ones given in annual reports and quoted above.

4. I do not know if prices still are fixed today.

5. The old market has since then been demolished and a separate khat market built (next to the new, modern market). I do not know how much the Isiolo Country Council charges for rent there.

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