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KIWIRA MARKET, an interface emphasizing African urban-rural interactions

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Despite its small size, the market of Kiwira plays a key role in the commercial food crops exchange system. Like many African markets, Kiwira performs functions of social and commercial exchange. This periodic market is located in Uporoto Mountains, in the south-western part of Tanzania. These mountains, like the majority of East African Mountains¹, are production basins of foodstuffs for the urban demand. Excepting the modest urban centre of Kiwira, the surroundings are rural, such as three quarters of Tanzanian landscapes: the rate of urbanisation of Tanzania is 26%².

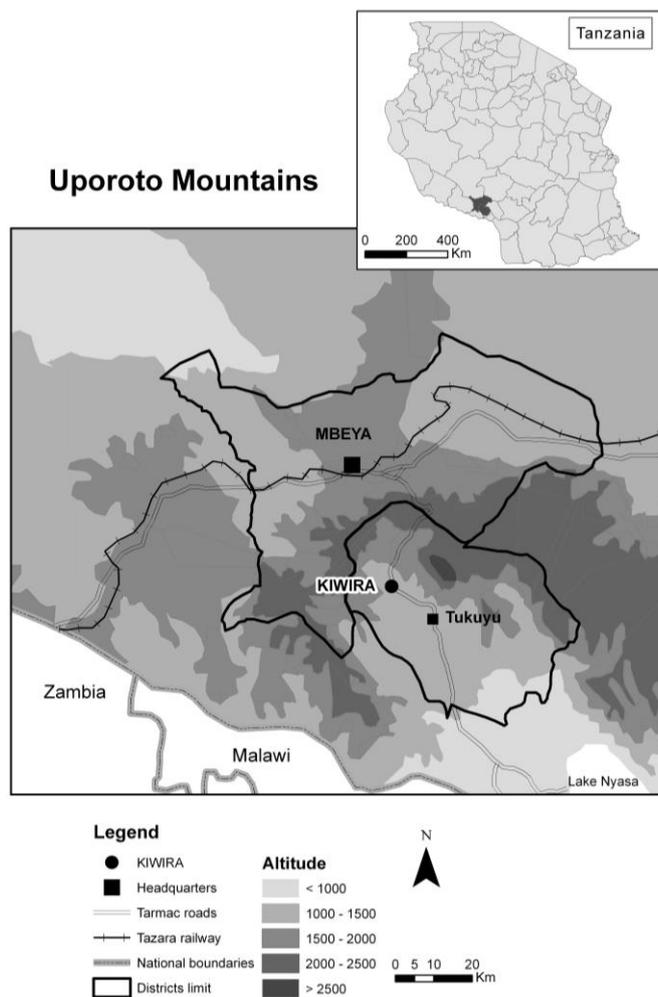


Figure 1, Uporoto Mountains in Tanzania, S Racaud, 2012

¹ As Mount Kilimandjaro (5895m), Mount Meru (4545m), Mount Kenya (5199m), Mount Elgon (4321m) to mention some among the highest. One can add that the highlands of the two rift valleys of East Africa are important agricultural production zones.

² It should reach 29% in 2020. e-Geopolis, 2009. Online <http://www.e-geopolis.eu/spip.php?article269&lang=en> . (Consulted on the 5th March 2013).

The dynamics of Uporoto Mountains illustrate those of East African Mountains, they have to be understood in a context of population growth, urban growth, rising land pressure and of economies based on agriculture. 79% of the Tanzanian work in agriculture (FAO, 2005) and in 2002, more than 2/3 of the regional GDP came from agricultural activities³. The latter have adjusted to recent modifications of the economic environment. In the past 25 years, the liberalization of the economy has changed the agricultural model: food crops develop as commercial food crops in response to the increase in the urban demand. In such a context, Kiwira's periodic market plays as a major regional hub of exchange between a myriad of actors. In other words, Kiwira is an interface that crystallises the more significant urban-rural interactions in East African Mountains.

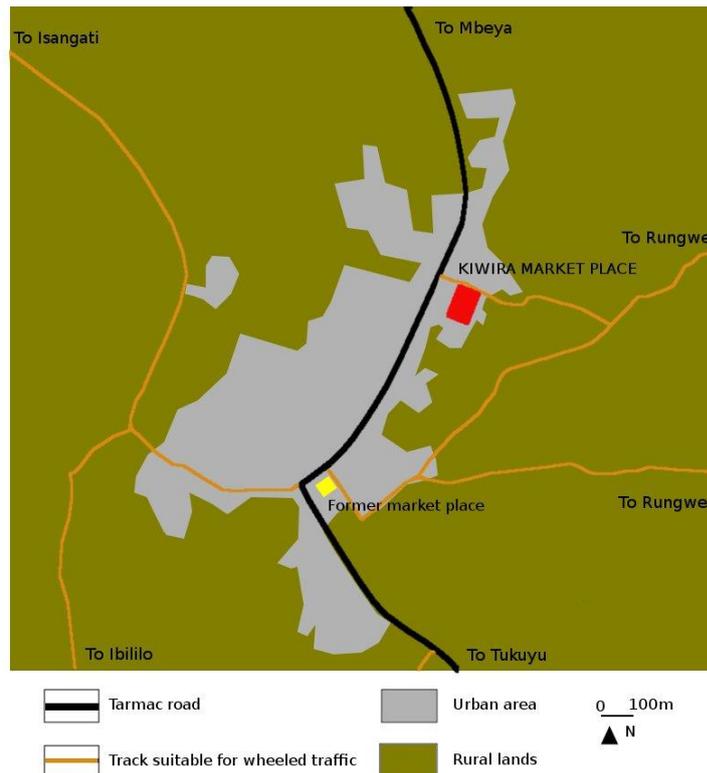


Figure 2, Kiwira, S Racaud, 2012

The market is named after the local river that has its source in the Mount Rungwe (2960m) and flows to Lake Nyasa, at the foot of the Mounts Livingstone. Kiwira is also the name of a ward including five villages, among which Mpanda Mpanda (4000inh.⁴), at a height of 1400m, where the market takes place. Mpanda Mpanda is located on the asphalted road B345 that links Mbeya, the regional metropolis, to Malawi 115km to the south. Kiwira market is irrigated by the agricultural productions of its hinterland; as a consequence, Kiwira is the mirror of its hinterland. The main cultivated crops at this mountainous level (1300-1600m) are maize, banana, beans, then sweet potatoes, fruits (avocado, pine apple), cassava,

³ Data for Mbeya Region. URT (2011) *Regional Socio-Economic Profile*. URT, Regional Office of Planning. 322p.

⁴ URT (2003), *2002 Population and housing census-General report*. DAR, URT, National Bureau of statistics. .

and in a lesser extent tea and coffee⁵. The market draws a striking image, mixing the many colours of the foodstuffs and the *boubou* worn by the myriad of women. The atmosphere is very busy, the ambient background noise urging people to speak loudly to carry as they carry out their transactions. The customers are mainly women, as are also most of the sellers. They while away the time making wicker baskets, shelling green peas, chatting. Some of the produce, such as the dry fish, as well as the small basic restaurants, spread a wide range of smells. The market is organised inside and around a rectangular fence, it is 110m long and 80m wide. Inside the enclosure, there is a 40m long and 40m large covered space. A multitude of sellers operate around the enclosure. The area at the main gate of the market is the zone where the banana wholesalers run their business. Considering the formal/informal characteristic of operations, there is a kind of concentric organisation of business, informality increasing with the distance from the fence.

The initial market of Kiwira was built in the 1950's, and dealt with retail sale. It became too cramped and a new, larger market was set up in 1985, located 100 metres from the tarmac road. For years the infrastructures were very limited, no gates, no stores and no roof, but the space was available to enable numerous transactions of important volume. The roof and the gate were respectively built in 2007 and in 2009 thanks to a development program⁶. The ward committee managed the market up to 2009. Since then, it has been managed by its own board, composed of a chairman, a vice-chairman, a secretary, a treasurer, and representatives of the traders, the farmers, the transporters, and of the SACCOS⁷. These are elected for three-year mandates, by the farmers and the traders. The board has to operate basic functions like the maintenance of equipment. It also has to solve internal problems and take decisions and, last but not least, assisted by public officers, it is in charge of collecting taxes on behalf of the district.

Social functions of African rural market are meaningful, people exchange much more than goods. The periodic markets are meeting places where news is exchanged and where friendships are tied or untied. The market day, called *gulio* in Kiswahili⁸, is a ritual event happening each Tuesday and each Friday at Kiwira, from sunrise to about 4pm. There are between 1000 and 2000 various selling points, depending on the season. About three quarters of the sellers are local farmers. According to local leaders, 15000 to 20000 people converge on *gulio*. There is a gender division of activities: generally, women are engaged in very small volume trading of fresh foodstuffs while men do business with manufactured commodities. The middlemen in commercial food crop chains may be both men and women. People can also meet around a cup of fermented milk, or of locally brewed beer. The social functions perpetuate traditional customs; they are articulated with the commercial functions that integrate the rural "way of life" to the market economy.

⁵ Tea and coffee are collected in the farms by agents working for companies. Those traditional commercial crops are not sold in periodic markets.

⁶ The Agricultural Sector Development Programme (ASDP) is a program implemented by the Government of Tanzania.

⁷ Saving and Credit Cooperative System (SACCOS): it is a micro finance association based on participative management. The SACCOS movement is well spread in Africa (but not only) to provide micro-credit.

⁸ Kiswahili is the official language in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda. It is a lingua franca shared by the inhabitants of Great Lakes Africa.

Kiwira market carries out two complementary commercial functions: the supplying of the local population and the collection of foodstuffs before their dispatch to urban centres. Like most markets, Kiwira's is divided into different sections specialised in particular products. The covered area protects the dry foodstuffs from the rain, the roof shelters the grains sector: maize, rice, beans, and to a lesser extent peanut. Those crops come from the lower lands of the region. They are stocked in 100-120kgs bags, small amounts being spread on a raised floor designed for protecting against rainwater flows. The dry fish from Lake Nyasa and Lake Rukwa occupies a strip on the side of the covered area. Here the sellers are exclusively women; some move from market to market, following the rhythm of the *gulios*, others do business exclusively in Kiwira.

The business of fresh foodstuffs occupies the most important part of the open space, which is divided into sections according to the type of produce. These crops are locally grown, and sold by farmers who bring a part of their own crop as well as crops bought in surrounding farms. The vegetables (carrots, tomatoes, green peas), the tubers (cassava, yam, sweet potato), and the fruits (avocado, pineapple) are stocked in wicker baskets of about 30kgs. A small part of the stock is set up on the floor, showing it's best face in small piles that represent the unit of sale. The unit for round potatoes is the basket, that is about 18kgs. The business here is retail sale to local customers. Sellers have spread to in front of the market and along the left fence, showing that the formal infrastructure is already too exiguous. These commercial exchanges correspond to the model of an imperfect market, *i.e.* non-standardised transactions, the use of piles or buckets instead of weight, volatile prices and deficient access to information and to the market. In a liberal economic environment, commercial transactions, regardless of quantity, give opportunities to power relations to express themselves. Asymmetries appear as differences in bargaining capacities, the latter depending on many factors: supply/demand balances, access to information, to the market, perishability, specific actors strategies, etc.



Figure 3, Kiwira market, S Racaud, 2012

The business of manufactured goods takes place on the right side of the enclosure. The main goods are a wide variety of cooking pots and tools, plastic buckets and, above all, clothes. The brand new clothes are arranged on vertical displays made of clothes lines one on top of the other. The second hand clothes and shoes are generally laid on canvas covers set on the floor. The sellers move daily from market to market, drawing a geography of *gulios* of the Uporotos Mountains. They pack into the trucks early in the morning, seated on the piles of commodities; they spend the day at the market and then they return at night, sometimes after a few local brewed beers if the day was not bad. These traders are men, for the most part originating from the region. Some young men follow the steps of their elders and run a small business of various Chinese items (fashion accessories, watches, radios, etc). Some women sell common goods *e.g.* cooking oil, salt, soap, petrol, oil lamp, etc. They generally live in the village and they use the market to diversify their income. Beside the common function of distributing through retail sales, Kiwira market is a hub for banana's business.

The wholesalers come from distant, big cities and come directly or send an agent to buy and to organise transport of the banana bunches. Often, orders are made to local agents, who must bring the requested amount on market or the day before. The 8 to 15 tonne trucks are loaded in front of the main gates. During the market day, the wholesalers have to ensure that the order is fulfilled. If the local agents did not bring enough bananas, the wholesalers get supplies from the numerous banana sellers. The buyers have to pay a tax that represents about 50USD per tonne. There are between 10 to 20 trucks per market and the total amount of collected taxes can reach 12000USD. The taxes are collected for the district, and 15% are paid back to Kiwira. This income is increasing, as a consequence urban investments are underway, *e.g.* in 2011 the market's committee financed the building of a guesthouse in front of the market. A petrol station and a new building are under construction; the latter will be a SACCOS office. The boost in agricultural activities means an increase in incomes and in the urbanisation of the town.



Figure 4, Trucl loading, Kiwira market, S Racaud, 2012

The strength of Kiwira market lies in its attractiveness, that is its capacity to collect bananas and to attract wholesalers of distant towns. Kiwira dispatches banana to supply the urban demand in Dar es Salaam, Dodoma and to a lesser extent in Zambia, in Malawi and sometimes in DRC and Botswana. The main factors of Kiwira's comparative advantages are the generous environmental conditions, the dynamic peasantry and the strategic location on the B 345 road. This axis is the main channel of the flows between the mountain and the distant urban consumer sites, both in Tanzania and in the sub-region. The boost in the agricultural business partakes of the urban dynamic of rural areas. Kiwira market has a relative knock-on effect on its hinterland and on neighbouring villages; it has favoured the creation of another *gulio* in a close village called Ibililo. Ibililo *gulio*'s objective is to benefit from the attractiveness of Kiwira market.

The market of Kiwira is a hotspot of exchanges, both social and economic. It is a starting point and in a lesser extent an ending point. It is a symbol of the amplification of agriculture and of the integration of rural areas to the national territory and to the global economy through urbanisation and access to the market. Kiwira, like the majority of bustling African markets, is an interface that structures urban-rural dynamics articulating several geographical scales; in other words, it is a medium adjusting the face-to-face encounter of several dimensions of society.