

# The Friends Church and the Development of a Christian Commercial Agricultural Elite in Western Kenya, 1902- 1963

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## Abstract

*This article assesses the correlation between the Friends African Mission (FAM) and the nurturing of a Christian commercial agricultural elite in western Kenya. FAM set in motion a secular policy that was articulated, through education, medical, industrial and agricultural departments. The article argues that FAM's agricultural policy provided an important platform for nurturing the development of a commercial agricultural elite. The elite in turn spearheaded Luhya demands for better agricultural production, particularly individual land tenure systems and the growing of high yielding and lucrative cash crops. Through commercial agriculture, the elite increasingly attained the status of a middle class or petite bourgeoisie and became reference points at the level of economic and political advancement.*

## 1. Introduction

The Friends African Mission (FAM), was the first Christian mission to establish a station in western Kenya, at Kaimosi, in 1902, among the Tiriki. It should be noted from the onset that in the late 1890s, there was a dramatic outburst of mission energies as the Uganda Railway and the newly established colonial administration, opened up the previously inaccessible interior of Kenya. Indeed, FAM was one of the

missionary bodies that followed the railway to the interior; the pioneer FAM Missionaries in Kenya, Willis Hotchkiss, Arthur Chilson and Elisha

Blackburn, used the newly constructed railroad and arrived at Kisumu in July 1902. They were warmly received by the railway officials and C.W. Hobley, the District Commissioner, who assisted the missionaries by planning a tour through North Kavirondo and Nandi districts. He also invited them to accompany him on a visit to Mumias, his district headquarters (Strayer, 1978: 30).

After eight weeks of trekking through the then North Kavirondo district of western Kenya, the missionaries found a suitable site at Kaimosi, and decided to work among the Luhya because the area seemed suitable for implementing the Friends' ideas about salvation and civilization (Painter, 1966: 21).

## **2. The Establishment of the Industrial Mission**

The pioneer missionaries selected Kaimosi as a possible location for their mission station for very practical reasons. Potential water power derived from the falls of Goli Goli River - which would operate a saw and flour mill - was considered an asset in developing a spiritual and an industrial mission. There was also an adequate supply of timber for the proposed saw mill and ample land for agriculture. Finally, was the location, termed by the missionaries as the "friendly and receptive people" (Painter, 1966: 22). With these practical considerations in mind, the missionaries chose Kaimosi to become the centre of FAM and the future East African Yearly Meeting of Friends (EAYM). Indeed, in 1904, a timber saw and a flour mill were constructed on the Goli Goli River, and true to the missionary's statements, the water "provided power to drive a saw through logs and rip them into boards, and grind grain into meal". These events marked the foundation of the FAM among the Luhya of western Kenya (Painter, 1966: 22).

After the establishment of the above industrial mission, the Friends missionaries began to expand and through the establishment of new stations in western Kenya, by 1918, FAM had established stations at Vihiga among the Maragoli, Lirhanda among the Isukha and Idakho, Lugulu among the Bukusu and Tachoni and Malava, among the Kabras (Amatsimbi, 2009:68). It was from these five stations that the FAM missionaries hoped to transform Luhya culture, and make converts for Christ. According to the FAM missionaries, Christianity was the best method of "civilization"; it was assumed that that the western Christian world represented the highest form of civilization and therefore the missionaries considered it their responsibility to extend this high civilization to the peoples who had none or very low ones. Evangelization and civilization were, therefore, considered inseparable and conversion to Christianity would involve not only an acceptance of the gospel, but also the adoption of western culture. The converts were expected to abandon their traditional ways of life and pattern their new Christian existence in accordance with norms which they would learn from the mission station (EAYM, Friends African Industrial Report, 1904:2).

However, the pioneer FAM missionaries quickly realized that the entire pattern of African society first had to be altered before Africans would accept Christianity. It was this realization that influenced the pioneer FAM missionaries to think of establishing an industrial mission. The industrial mission, as envisaged by the pioneer FAM missionaries, had two aspects. The first was the recognition that the religious goal of conversion must be accompanied by secular efforts to "improve" African standards of living. In other words, the FAM missionaries believed that a secular policy would complement spiritual work. Consequently, the FAM missionaries established four secular departments as an enticement to conversion. These departments included education, medical, industrial and agricultural departments. To the FAM missionaries, religious evangelization represented the fundamental method to transform western Kenya. Education, medical services, industrial and agricultural development were only alternative approaches used by the FAM to reinforce evangelization and win converts. It was thought that Christianity would not take root until people

learned new methods of education, industrial skills, medical care, trade and agriculture. The presupposition underlying this view was that, if Africans were trained in the above attributes, they would find it easier to accept the gospel, having “experienced the alleviation of some of their major material handicaps” (EAYM, Friends African Industrial Report, 1904:3).

The acceptance or rejection of the Gospel was, therefore, considered to be dependent on the possibilities of new ways of life to improve the material welfare of prospective converts. The second aspect that influenced the industrial mission strategy was the emphasis on self-sufficiency and hence, self-sustenance of the FAM mission. The FAM missionaries believed that they should teach Luhyia Christian converts to assume the major responsibility for evangelizing their own people. They also believed that provision must be made to ensure that the mission itself was self-supporting and they were convinced that an industrial mission was best placed to accomplish this end through providing a strong type of mission station. By teaching Africans practical skills in agriculture, the industrial mission would “equip African Christians with the tools to transform their own society”. At the same time, the mission could earn funds from the sale of the goods produced and have a trained labour force to help at the station (EAYM, Friends African Industrial Report, 1904:3).

### **3. Incipient Commercial Farmers**

The agricultural feature of evangelization was introduced by the pioneer FAM missionaries, with the hope of developing, “self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating African church” (Hotchkiss, 1937:95). The pioneer FAM missionaries argued that the Christian message could not be effectively proclaimed in a social vacuum. For instance, Hotchkiss stressed that:

The people to whom the Christian evangelism was being taken need adequate food for their families, better houses, basic medical care and education. If these basic assets for living were to become significant for the Africans, they must be taught to attain these things through the labour of their own hands. This would mean learning new skills and use of strange tools (Hotchkiss, 1902:87).

The FAM missionaries were therefore convinced, that an industrial programme would provide an opportunity for Christian witnessing in a manner that most Africans could understand. Consequently, in 1913, FAM acquired the services of Frank Conover, a farmer from America and an agricultural specialist and mandated him to expand the agricultural programme that had been started, since 1902, when the first station was established.

Conover gave practical demonstration in planting and cultivating fruit trees, vegetables and maize to the converts and pupils at the various stations. He also began to teach the Luhyia converts what he termed as better “agricultural methods, including planting crops in regular rows”. Conover also helped the Kaimosi and Lirhanda stations to experiment with the growing of coffee; Kaimosi started off with 1,900 coffee trees and Lirhanda, 300 trees. In addition, 1,500 pineapples were planted at Kaimosi. At Vihiga, about half an acre was planted with black wattle “in accordance with our plan to plant trees until a constant supply of fuel is assured at the station” (Hotchkiss, 1902:87).

Using the knowledge acquired from the mission station-farms, a number of FAM converts - including Yohana Amugune, Joel Litu, Andrea Agufuna, Daniel Akelo and Yohana Lumwagi - had by 1914 put a large acreage under simsim. In the same year, the secretary for Native Affairs, A.C. Hollis, reported that the population of Nyanza could make more money by selling agricultural produce than by engaging in wage

employment and that “the Kavirono were practically the only progressive natives in the country”. Consequently, in 1914 the government “began to direct part of its effort toward the agricultural education of the natives”. Indeed, the government encouraged “some of the more ambitious chiefs” to send their children “to the government farm at Kabete [Kikuyu] to learn agricultural development, particularly the use of animal-pulled ploughs” (Amatsimbi, 2009:104).

With the opening up of Trans-Nzoia white settlement, after the First World War, many Friends Christians among the Bukusu, Tachoni and Kabras seized the opportunity of wage employment and flocked to the European farms. A number of them on return to their homes, started to put into practice the semi-mechanized farming that they had learned on the European farms. It was therefore the FAM converts who first planted the new maize seeds and adopted the techniques impressed upon them by the administrative and agricultural officers. They consciously aimed at expanding their production for sale in order to purchase the new consumer goods, to improve their homes and meet new expenses, such as school fees and church dues. Consequently, in the 1930s, Bukusu, Tachoni and Kabras locations, became large-scale and commercial maize farming locations mainly due to the African Friends farmers

Friends’ converts used their contacts through the church to develop these opportunities, for example, in 1927, Bukusu and Tachoni men - like Peter Wanyama, Philip Mwangale, Zakayo Wasike, Peter Makari, Aaron Wakhungu, Yohana Masambu and Andrea Chemiati, who each owned between 20 to 25 acres of land - became the first African Friends to mechanize their farms through the use of animal-pulled iron ploughs. In Kabras, Joseph Ngaira, Zacharia Makhalan’gan’ga, Richard Chesoni, Samuel Imbuye, Elijah Nandi, Samson Marani, Rasto Katami, Isaac Wabuge and Samson Wekulo, all large scale farmers, also adopted the use of iron ploughs. Consequently, the sale of ploughing equipment skyrocketed and by 1938, there were 2,109 ploughs in the district (Amatsimbi, 2009:174).

The Bukusu, Tachoni and Kabras farmers, led by Friends such as Philip Mwangale and Zacharia Makhalan’gan’ga, respectively, also acted on their own initiative to develop an effective bulk-marketing system and campaigned to obtain better prices for their produce. At the time, Africans were not allowed to sell maize directly to Europeans, or to the government. They were, therefore, forced to sell their produce through Asian middlemen, who were often unscrupulous in their business methods, under pricing African goods. The government, anxious to encourage African maize production, in order to offset deficiencies caused by the slump (due to the depression of 1930s) in settler production of maize, agreed to increase the price of maize per bag paid to African farmers from 90 cents to Sh 2.50 in 1930, after the deduction of the cost of bags and transportation (Gilpin, 1976: 179). The government also allowed Africans to sell their maize directly to the Kenya Farmers Association (KFA), a settler organization. Consequently, many large-scale African farmers joined KFA, at a fee of Sh.200. In addition, the district reports of 1937 indicated that:

There are now three Local Native Councils (LNCs) go-downs in the district at Luanda, Butere and Broderick Falls [Webuye]. All are now leased to KFA for Shs. 700 per annum. The last named was handed over to a native company of some 80 members who are themselves one member of the KFA [Kenya National Archives (KNA), DC/NN/1/9, 1937:5].

The native company, mentioned in the report, the Kimilili Farmers’ Association, was formed in 1936, under the leadership of Philip Mwangale. Out of the 80 members of the company, 70 were Friends converts. Through Mwangale’s advice, the company “pledged to sell its maize solely to the KFA” (Amatsimbi, 2009: 173).

An important feature of this agricultural development is that Friends converts formed new economic groups through the church. They had been taught that Christians should be self-sufficient and that they should work hard to avoid famine. While the church preached the protestant work ethic, the European missionaries taught practical knowledge and skills. Luhyia Friends, particularly in the northern locations of the district, also had the advantage of surplus land and more sympathetic government policy towards the type of crops suitable for the area - maize - and consequently invested in agriculture. The church thus provided the double example of a cooperative group and a vehicle through which development could be discussed and ideas shared.

Such developments brought considerable prosperity to the new crop of Bukusu, Tachoni and Kabras Christian farmers of the 1930s. The new marketing arrangement further increased the price per bag to Sh. 6/- with the additional bonus of Sh. 1.40/ per bag. Consequently, maize production increased and by 1935, Mwangale and his partners were producing over 1000 bags of maize per annum. The maize produced by Africans and ferried to the railway line at Broderick Falls for export, rose from 4,600 bags in 1933, to 23,600 bags in 1935. The expansion of production and export continued throughout the second half of the decade and by 1939, 453,000 bags, valued at £136,000 - approximately Sh. 1.36 million - which reports noted was a small decline from the previous years, were exported outside the district. By the end of the decade, the area around Webuye, Kimilili, Malava and Lugari had become North Kavirondo's leading producer and exporter of maize in Kenya, leading to the development of commercial agriculture and an incipient middle class in western Kenya. (KNA, DC/NN/1/9, 1937:5).

#### **4. Commercial Agricultural Elite, 1940- 1963**

The end product of the rapid acceptance of Christianity and education was broader economic transformation, during the war and in the post-war period, particularly among the Luhyia converts. For instance, the Friends converts in the northern locations of the district, with much more land and experience of agricultural development in the settled area of Trans-Nzoia, took up education as a means of helping them to become commercial farmers, and accumulated economic resources. One can assume then that, education and commercial farming led to the emergence of a small but growing middle class, or *petite bourgeoisie* (Amatsimbi, 2009:205). And as in the case of education, the FAM educated elite increasingly began to challenge government policies on African agricultural development. It was such agitation by Luhyia commercial farmers that forced the colonial government in the 1940s, to take a number of measures aimed at increasing African agricultural production.

The first was the demand of World War II for greater production of foodstuffs by Africans, particularly in the fertile districts, such as North Nyanza, to support the war effort. The second was the need to avert food shortages that had been occasioned by the 1943 famine in western Kenya. The causes of the famine could be found in the limited access to adequate land which afflicted many households, particularly in the southern locations of the district, where population density per square mile had reached over a thousand people in some areas. On the ground, such figures translated into shrinking land holdings, soil degradation and decreasing yields. The government thus declared food security and soil conservation as the major priorities for North Nyanza district. Consequently, the agricultural staff - while advocating for increased food production - introduced an intensive soil conservation programme, warning that African farmers should not be allowed to imagine that the government was no longer concerned about the way that land was being treated; the food efforts of the war notwithstanding. Indeed, it was argued that increased production of foodstuffs and raw materials was not possible in the absence of measures aimed at promoting soil fertility (Maxon, 2003: 153).

To promote soil fertility, the government adopted a new policy which sought to encourage the improvement of agricultural techniques and prevent food shortages through diversification. To this end, the planting of cassava, sweet potatoes, sorghum and beans in addition to maize was encouraged. The new policy also sought to increase food production through mixed farming with the addition of manure to the soils. Agricultural officers argued that by combining animal husbandry and agricultural production, mixed farming would protect the soil while providing the farmer with improved standards of living (Fearn, 1961:210). In order to realize the set objective in soil conservation and food security, the agricultural department adopted an individualist approach to agricultural development. This method attempted to introduce improved farming practices through offering rewards under the betterment fund to “progressive or better farmers” (KNA, DC/NN/1/31, 1949:1).

The policy behind better farming was “to make use of progressive African farmers in various parts of the district to initiate and demonstrate improved methods of farming and the use of new crops” (KNA, DC/NN/1/37, 1955: 2). Consequently, to qualify for the betterment agricultural fund, a farmer had to demonstrate to an agricultural officer that he had incorporated soil conservation measures, adhered to a planned crop-rotation and exhibited good animal husbandry. On the award of a certificate of good husbandry, a “better farmer” could obtain farming equipment, like the metal plough and wheelbarrows –to enable him to apply compost to his land – from the African District Council (ADC) at subsidized prices, and he could also sell his produce directly to the Maize and Produce Inspection Centre. Other privileges available to better farmers included bonuses of Sh.2.10 per bag on maize prices and access to educational tours (KNA, DC/NN/1/37, 1955: 2).

In 1950, for instance, the government disbursed Sh.76, 030 toward the betterment fund in North Nyanza. These funds were distributed as follows - government loans, Sh.5, 000; Agricultural Betterment Fund through agricultural officers, Sh.44, 360; Agricultural Betterment Fund through livestock officers, Sh.23, 600; and bonus payment through maize control, Sh.3, 070. Among the main beneficiaries of these loans were African FAM educated farmers in the northern locations - where land for farming was still readily available due to low population density - who had responded to betterment farming incentives. Notably, farmers from both the northern and southern locations of the district - such as Philip Mwangale, Zakayo Wasike, Hudson Sanja, Benjamin Kapten, Simeon Luvale, Samuel Imbuye, Luka Chekata, Benjamin Shikomera, Jeremiah Sejero, Samuel Mwinamo, Isaac Lucheti, William Shibadu, Andrea Jumba and Paul Agoi - applied for betterment loans and began moving toward individual land holdings. Even with the betterment funding, however, African farmers - particularly, the commercial farmers - still pressed for more government support, especially for the growing of the high yielding and more lucrative Arabica coffee (KNA, DC/NN/1/37, 1955: 2)

With continued pressure from the Africans and with the desire to win the support of “better farmers” in implementing government agricultural policies, the Director of Agriculture, in February 1949, announced that Africans should be allowed to grow arabica coffee “in areas where coffee was known to grow well.” Consequently, the colonial agricultural officers initiated the growing of arabica coffee in North Nyanza District in 1951, though initially restricting it to better farmers with plots of at least seven acres. This requirement was informed by the consideration that:

In order to grow coffee a farmer had to have more land for food crops, fodder and crops for compost. It was therefore necessary to put a minimum to the acreage necessary for a person to grow coffee. Another thing which made the minimum necessary was that if

people were allowed to grow coffee, it would be impossible to carry out consolidation of farms later (KNA, CS/1/14/9, 1955: 1).

Agricultural officers in North Nyanza argued that most peasant farmers with low acreage had not adopted the improved farming methods, and risked producing low quality coffee. Indeed, strict regulations introduced regarding the planting, weeding, pruning and harvesting of coffee meant that only a few farmers benefited from being allowed to grow the crop. Consequently, the 1950s saw strong opposition to colonial agricultural policies by peasants, however, most members of the ADC, who had each accumulated more than seven acres of land, supported that administration's restriction on arabica coffee planting on a small scale. In 1953, for instance, it was reported that:

The ADC committee after hearing the views of the District Agricultural Officer and the President (of the ADC) agreed that farmers should follow the instruction of the department of agriculture (KNA, CS/1/14/97, 1955: 1)

Further, in 1953 the North Nyanza ADC introduced a new loan development scheme aimed at supporting coffee farmers. Under this scheme, "better farmers with at least 15 acres would receive a maximum of Sh.2, 000 and Sh.4, 000 for farms above 15 acres". Consequently, it was the better farmers and FAM educated ADC councillors - such as Jeremiah Sejero, Hezron Mushenye, William Mnubi, Thomas Lung'aho, Andrea Agufana, Charles Kibarege, Andrea Jumba, William Shibadu, Daniel Lyula, James Angote, Petro Wanyama, Samuel Imbuye, Benjamin Kapten and Philip Mwangale - who spearheaded the introduction of arabica coffee growing and benefited from the new development loan schemes (KNA, CS/1/14/97, 1955: 1).

In 1954, commercialization of African agriculture was given a major boost, through the £5 million made available by the Swynnerton Plan. The Plan, drawn up by the Deputy Director of Agriculture, R. J. M. Swynnerton, took advantage of the availability of Colonial Development and Welfare Funds. It represented an abandonment of the earlier efforts to constrain the development of African commodity production of coffee and tea, among other crops. Along with the land consolidation and registration campaigns, the Plan was to provide the essential elements of African agricultural development. It sought to consolidate and enclose land holdings, establish individual land tenure systems, provide capital and services, and encourage extended production of cash crops to enable farmers derive income from their land holdings beyond subsistence. The intention here was to create a stable African landowning class, with access to capital and income to be derived from the growth of cash crops hitherto preserved for white farmers (Kenya Colony and Protectorate, 1954: 5).

African commercial farmers or the better farmers also benefited from this new government initiative in agriculture. For instance, government reports indicated that, "there has been a general awakening amongst farmers in their desire to consolidate and enclose their land, a trend which is spreading throughout the district" (KNA, PC/NZA/4/4/115, 1961:3). Through the consolidation and enclosure of their lands, large scale farmers, like Philip Mwangale and Zacharia Makhalan'gan'ga, accumulated more land and turned more efforts towards commercial farming; thus becoming the leading African farmers in Kenya. Indeed, farmers like Festus Lisomade, Andrea Agufana, Joel Litu, Matayo Esendi, Daniel Akelo, Charles Kibarege, Andrea Jumba and William Shibadu, apart from growing coffee also began to grow tea, thus allowing the accumulation of more land and resources, well above what their peasant neighbors could achieve (EAYM, Report of the Stewardship Advisor, 1963: 3).

In line with the colonial government's support for agricultural development, the FAM recruited Rodney Morris as an agricultural missionary in 1955, to initiate the planning and development of the Kaimosi farms - with the view of to demonstrate to African farmers, new farming techniques. In 1959, Morris became convinced of the need for programmes that would work directly with and in the community, and be centred on the community rather than the school. Consequently, Morris proposed the Lord's Acre Programme to teach progressive Christian farmerson stewardship and methods of increasing agricultural productivity, without initially involving the farmers in risking their subsistence needs. Many progressive farmers began to implement the new farming methods as demonstrated at Kaimosi Farm. The new farming methods increased their maize yields, a factor which attracted more farmers to the "better farming practices" (Amatsimbi, 2009: 244).

### **5. Rural Service Programme**

Rural Service Programme (RSP) was started at Kaimosi in 1962 as a church-based development organization. The programme was intended to facilitate community development, in commercial agriculture, among other fields. RSP was designed to be jointly funded by the FAM and Friends in America, Britain, Germany, Switzerland and Sweden. RSP concentrated on commercial vegetable growing, increasing maize production through mechanized farming, animal husbandry and using the Kaimosi farm for training seminars and demonstrations to farmers. Indeed, Rodney Morris, the director of the programme, on occasion used the Kaimosi tractor to plough the farms of Luhyia Friends converts.

RSP was also responsible for the establishment of Lugari Farmers' Christian Training Centre. This project began in 1961, "when the Friends church learned of the resettlement programme by the Kenya government". In May 1963, the Settlement Department, the Christian Council of Kenya and FAM began negotiations to establish an agricultural and church development programme in Lugari. A final agreement between the three parties was reached in September 1963. After this agreement, the centre was inaugurated on the 6<sup>th</sup> of January, 1964. It soon became an adult education venture, with instruction in animal and crop husbandry and soil conservation. The centre was also important in the settlement of Luhyia Friends in the land scheme. Those who benefited were mainly the Maragoli Friends, especially the educated, who had been affected by the scarcity of land due to population pressure in their area. The FAM helped to purchase and to settle them in farms vacated by white settlers in the Lugari area. Others who benefited included the Kabras, Bukusu, Tachoni and Tiriki. Many of these new settlers became commercial farmers with interests in growing maize (Amatsimbi, 2009: 244).

### **6. The Impact of Christian Commercial Agricultural Elite**

Among the early Luhyia converts, religious conversion set in motion various processes of change that manifested themselves in socio-economic advancement. To the new converts, their lives were now ordered on what was perceived to be a Christian and, hence, a modern way of life. And as Christianity took root among the pioneer minority, conversion and association with the new Christian culture began to be viewed as a means to economic advancement and success, indeed, pioneer converts claim that they became better individuals after conversion. The acquisition of European education and material items turned them into one of the most influential people in their locations, thus affording them respect and prestige.

For the commercial agricultural elites, the church had provided a vehicle, not only for economic development but also for political gain. Consequently, they represented the new economic order in their communities. For instance, just as Friends like Benjamin Kaptan, Philip Mwangale and Petro Wanyama had been the first Bukusu to become commercial maize farmers in the 1930s, and coffee farmers in 1950s, many

Maragoli Friends such as -Mathew Mwenesi, Paul Agoi, Andrea Munubi and Andrea Agufana - were among the first to plant coffee in the 1950s. Among the Kabras, Friends - Samuel Imbuye and Benjamin Shikomera pioneered the sugarcane and jaggery industry in Malava. In Tiriki, Friends like William Shibadu and Andrea Jumba were the first to have their lands surveyed, issued with title deeds and were also the first to plant coffee and tea (Amatsimbi, 2009: 312).

Two distinct social classes emerged among the Luhyia as a result of the FAM activities. First, there were the FAM educated elite who had increasingly attained the status of a middle class or *petite bourgeoisie* and secondly, there were the peasants. The educated elite were composed of African colonial officials mostly mission educated. Wielding political and social authority, administrative leaders - such as chiefs, ADC councilors and the educated elite - combined their salaries as chiefs, councilors, court clerks, school supervisors, teachers and evangelists, with incomes from extensive holdings of land and/or commercial enterprise (KNA, PC/NZA/3/79, 1945:1).

Their new social status was reflected in the accumulation of resources and a demonstrable commitment to progress, through educating their children and taking advantage of the available economic opportunities in their areas. There is also evidence that during this time, settlement in the relatively unpopulated areas was pioneered by enterprising commercial agriculturalists, who perceived the opportunity to maximize their incomes through expanded maize and coffee production. It was these elite who pressed most determinedly for more advanced schools for their children, better health care, and more government aid to finance African education and medical services. Moreover, the advantages enjoyed by the educated elite went beyond those flowing from their control of ample resources and/or their eagerness to use them. They were also capable of exploiting favorable government economic development programmes and policies (KNA, DC/KMGA/1/49, 195: 1).

The elite's dominance of local colonial institutions further reinforced the advantages accruing from government policies. The Friends agricultural elite were more often recommended for loans or licences to operate businesses, a favourite among which was the transport sector, including the distribution of sugar and expansion of agricultural production. Thus, the elite's positions in the ADC, or their friendship with councillors, gave them an edge over the peasants when it came to securing a loan or licence. Up to 1953, for example, agricultural betterment loans, equipment, and technical support invariably went to the agricultural elite, who also doubled up as teachers and local council members, rather than to the peasant farmers. For instance, Chief H.B Mushenye, a Friends convert, secured a loan of Sh. 10,000, from the North Nyanza African District Council (ADC) to purchase a tractor. Indeed, even when the government's agricultural policy was changed from emphasis on soil conservation measures and food security, to the advancement of African agriculture through the cultivation of high yielding crops such as arabica coffee, the elite or "the better farmers" still benefited disproportionately from the programmes. Further, ADC councillors recommended that better farmers be trained abroad in modern farming in order to increase their farm production. It appears, therefore, that far from encouraging the development of peasant agriculture, the government's intention was to assist the "better farmers", in order to create a stable rural middle class - which would perceive its own interests as paralleling, rather than opposing, those of the government (KNA, DC/KMGA/1/49, 1951:2).

Having clearly enjoyed certain advantages over the ordinary peasants, the agricultural elite were beginning to pass these benefits on to their offspring. The elite's wealth and education ensured that their children would receive a high level of training, which was increasingly becoming necessary if the African was to

secure a well-paying position. For example, Fred Kamidi, Thomas Lung'aho and Benjamin Ngaira, the principal leaders in the EAYM, were also sons of the first Friends' church leaders and commercial farmers. Similarly, African Members of Parliament (hereafter MPs) for North Nyanza constituencies were the sons of Friends commercial agricultural elite. These MPs included Joseph Otiende, Masinde Muliro, Jonathan Muruli, and Seth Lugonzo. Others were Harry James Onamu, Werangai Masinde, Joshua Angatia, Nathan Munoko, Joseph Muliro and Peter Kibisu. The rest included Joseph Khaoya, Lawrence Sifuna, George Kapten, Elijah Mwangale, Noah Wakesa and Mukhisa Kituyi.

The children of Luhyia commercial agricultural elite also held various positions in the emerging government bureaucracy, just after independence. These included, Fred Kamidi, Joseph Lijembe, Philomena Indire, and Solomon Adagala. Others were Jotham Standa, Jonathan Mukoro, Benjamin Ngaira, Salome Nolega, the first woman Principal of Kaimosi Teachers College, and Eunice Nambiro, the first Luhyia woman District Officer. Thus, the commercial agricultural elite became leading lights in the economic and political transformation of the Luhyia of Western Kenya (Amatsimbi, 2009: 319).

The Friends converts were thus pioneers in adopting modern techniques in agriculture and invested in commercial farming, leading to economic prosperity and societal transformation. Acceptance of missionary education by the minority pioneer Christians meant that the Luhyia were open to many new innovations that helped to ignite the process of cultural transformation. By breaking with traditional beliefs and organizations, pioneer African Christians opened themselves to the possibility of contact with new groups and ideas. Their frequent relationships with Western missionaries opened up their previously cloistered world and led to an economic payoff through investment in commercial agriculture leading to accumulation of wealth.

## **7. Conclusion**

While intended as a review of the recent history of the Friends Church in Kenya, the central purpose of this article was to examine the role that the secular policy of the Friends Church played in nurturing the development of a commercial agricultural elites among the Luhyia of western Kenya. Although members of the Friends Church are to be found all over the country today, the vast majority of its adherents live, or have their origin, among the Luhyia of western Kenya.

It has been demonstrated that FAM education produced an incipient commercial elite class among the Luhyia. This new class was made up of among others, commercial agricultural elite, who used the church as a platform to acquire and accumulate resources and pass them on to their children.

These new elite possessed 'modern' knowledge, wealth, and power and hence, influence. They slowly, but increasingly, became the reference points for the young and old alike, and spearheaded African demands for better agricultural production particularly individual land tenure system among Africans, and the growing of high yielding and lucrative cash (crops like coffee and tea). This group owed their wealth and status to their positions in the mission establishment and their involvement in the cash crop and market economy. In turn, most of the elite used their wealth and connections in the church to engage in politics and thus became political and economic opinion leaders of western Kenya.

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