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The Historical Development of the Lugari Settlement Scheme, Kenya, 1963-2025

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Abstract

This article explored the evolution of the Lugari Settlement Scheme between 1963 and 2025, and analyses changes in land governance, settlement patterns, and socio-economic conditions. While post-independence land settlement programmes in Kenya have been studied extensively, studies examining the historical development of selected settlement schemes after their establishment remain limited. The study adopted a qualitative historical research design guided by Political Economy Theory. Data were collected through oral interviews and focus group discussions as primary sources, complemented by archival and documentary sources as secondary data. Respondents were identified using purposive and snowball sampling techniques, while thematic and chronological analyses were employed to analyse the data. The findings established that the Lugari Settlement Scheme emerged from Kenya's post-independence land reform and resettlement programme and evolved into a planned African smallholder farming community. Land governance changed from a predominantly centralised system of government allocation towards a more plural and decentralised arrangement involving formal institutions, local administration, families and community-based mechanisms. Changing settlement patterns, driven by population growth, inheritance and land subdivision, contributed to farm fragmentation, boundary disputes and declining agricultural holdings, while also encouraging livelihood diversification beyond smallholder farming. The study concludes that Lugari's historical evolution was shaped by changing political institutions, land policies, demographic pressures, economic interests and community needs. The study recommends strengthening participatory land governance, improving land administration and planning, and developing sustainable strategies for managing land fragmentation to safeguard agricultural productivity and community livelihoods.

Key terms: Economy, fragmentation, governance, land, resettlement.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Land has been an integral part of Kenya's political, economic and social development since its inception. In addition to being a productive resource, land has been linked to political power, social identity, household security, inheritance and economic survival. As such, access to, ownership and control of land has been the focus of Kenya's historical development (Manji, 2020; Okoth-Ogendo, 1991). The importance of land was also heightened through colonial policies, which undermined indigenous land tenure systems and facilitated the colonial state and European settlers to take over and manage large tracts of African land. Colonial land policies thus altered land relations, shifting much of the power over land to the colonial state, while also challenging communal and customary rights to land.

The displacement of Africans from productive areas of agriculture was facilitated by the Crown Lands Ordinances of 1902 and 1915, which gave the colonial government the legal structure for alienation and allocation of land. (Government of Kenya, 1902). The policies produced long-lasting inequities in access and ownership of land. This impact was prominent in western parts of Kenya, where more people were competing for land, leading to higher population pressure. Colonial interventions consequently created an unequal pattern of land access that remained a feature of land relations post-independence.

These changes were consolidated by agricultural and land tenure reform. The Kenya Department of Agriculture 1954 advocated for agricultural intensification, land consolidation and individualisation of land ownership in the African areas (Kenya Department of Agriculture, 1954). Despite the reforms being aimed at improving agricultural output and making African farmers economically viable, it also hastened the change of customary land relations and intensified the individual land registration process (Okoth-Ogendo, 1991). At independence, therefore, Kenya's land system was one of conflicting claims over land use associated with state authority, private ownership, customary land use and unequal access to productive land.

The land question accordingly became one of the litigations that faced the Kenyan Government at the time of independence in 1963. The main answer was the establishment of land redistribution and settlement schemes, which aimed at alleviating landlessness, expanding productive land ownership of Africans, encouraging agricultural development and rural settlement. In fact, settlement schemes were crucial to the process of post-independence state formation as land was being allocated, closely tied to development planning, political authority, territorial organisation and access to economic resources (Boone et al., 2021). The schemes were intended not only to distribute land but also to create productive rural communities, and to establish land ownership as part of the overall national development agenda.

The Lugari Settlement Scheme was part of this wider post-independence land reform and African resettlement. One of the contributing factors for the creation of the scheme was the need to alleviate the landless and population pressure of people coming from dense areas of western Kenya such as Maragoli and Bunyore (Saeteurn, 2020). It was thus a significant step by the post-independence government to offer land opportunities to Africans who did not have sufficient land for agricultural production and to encourage smallholder farming and rural development. The establishment of Lugari, thus, was a reflection of the more general political and economic goals of Kenya's post-independence settlement policy.

The story of Lugari, however, did not come to an end when land was allocated to the original inhabitants. The settlement scheme underwent various forms of political administration, land governance, tenure, inheritance, population, agricultural production, settlement and socio-economic activities over the next few decades (Amsalu & Kefale, 2023). The land that was originally allotted to individuals came under the laws of inheritance, subdivision, commercialisation and competing households. These processes changed the size and distribution of the agricultural holdings, and led to new forms of land-related disputes and livelihood problems (Rao, 2022).

Initially, it was hoped that improved access to productive agricultural land would lead to better living standards for the households, increase production of agricultural goods, and create stable rural populations (Mozumdar, 2012). However, the long-term development of the scheme was affected by population growth, fragmentation of land, boundary issues, institutional weaknesses and changing economic opportunities. The subdivision of holdings in the course of inheritance and other mechanisms that facilitated the transfer of land decreased the size of some farms, and the altered economic conditions fostered diversification of the household's livelihood away from smallholder farming (Rigg, 2006). Lugari's history is thus a story of ongoing processes in which land management, shifts in population and household strategies and economic interests have played a role over time.

This article is concerned with the central problem that, while there is much scholarship available in Kenya on the land question, and the land-tenure systems and post-independence settlement programmes in the country in particular, far less attention has been devoted to the long-term historical evolution of individual settlement schemes once established. Existing scholarship has helped advance the understanding of national land policies and the political economy of settlement, but less has been written on the internal histories and evolution of particular settlement schemes over the course of several decades, focusing on settlement patterns, inheritance, fragmentation and livelihoods (Boone et al., 2021; Manji, 2020; Saeteurn, 2020).

Studies of land tenure in Kenya have also shown the multiple dimensions of land ownership and state power, the law and social relations. However, most of this scholarship has been on national trends and the major institutional changes rather than on the interactions of these processes within specific settlement schemes over time (Manji, 2020; Okoth-Ogendo, 1991). The study of the history of Lugari is therefore relevant as it allows a shift in the scale of the land question from the broader national to the experiences and transformations of a particular settlement scheme. This will allow an analysis of the ways in which national policies and political-economic processes came to be localised and the reactions of settlers and later generations to varying land, economic and social conditions.

This article is then concerned with the history of the Lugari Settlement Scheme from 1963 to 2025, focusing on developments in land governance, settlement and socio-economic situations. Political Economy theory is adopted to guide the study, which offers a framework for studying the interaction between political power and economic interest and is supported by the structure of institutions, social relations and control over land as a productive resource. The article then reviews the literature on the study objectives, discusses the theoretical and methodological considerations, presents, analyses the findings, and finally discusses the significance of the changes that have taken place in the Lugari Settlement Scheme in the past.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical Development of Settlement Schemes in Kenya

Historically, land settlement has been a significant tool used by states to solve problems of inequitable land access, rural poverty, agricultural development and political agendas over land. Settlement and land redistribution programmes at the global level have frequently been linked to economic as well as political purposes, especially when governments have aimed to change the agrarian structures and push for small-scale farming. Experience from sub-Saharan Africa shows that land access is closely related to rural livelihood and political power and to evolving systems of land governance. For instance, Knapman et al. (2017) demonstrate that differential changes in land access conditions in African countries have significant implications for the livelihoods of smallholders and call for transformative land-governance institutions to account for the new and emerging dynamics of rural life. The more general literature is helpful for settlement schemes and their meaning beyond the agricultural context, but does not offer much insight into the internal development of specific settlement schemes over a period of decades.

On the African continent, scholarship has been growing more critical of interpretations that see land reform and settlement activities as primarily technical ones that aim to improve agricultural productivity. More specifically, Boone (2011) argues that in sub-Saharan Africa, politically allocated land rights can have a certain impact on political relations and political power dynamics. Her analysis is significant to this study as it provides a political-economic link between land rights, state authority and political interests. But the wide comparative context does not help to explain the evolution of particular settlement communities, nor how formally allocated land is subsequently modified by inheritance, subdivision and household choices. Likewise, Jayne et al. (2016) show that the changes in farm-size distributions in sub-Saharan Africa are linked with wider agricultural and economic transitions. While it does help to position land fragmentation in the broader context of African agrarian change, it is not enough to explain how the fragmentation processes in specific post-independence settlement schemes have occurred.

Settlement schemes in Kenya developed from a unique colonial land alienation and post-colonial land reform process. The study by Okoth-Ogendo (1991) shows that the colonial land legislation did change the land relations of the indigenous peoples and weakened their position while reinforcing the position of the state, and adding legal forms of individualised land ownership. His work is an important historical contribution to understanding why land redistribution became an issue at independence. His national institutional analysis does not include the social and economic development of individual settlement schemes, however, as much emphasis. In the same way, Manji (2020) shows that land in Kenya has always been a place of contestation between legal institutions, political interests, social inequalities, competing claims to ownership, and claims to justice. Her analysis is a useful contribution to understanding why land governance remains political and continues to be a contentious issue, but it fails to offer a detailed longitudinal account of specific settlement schemes.

Specifically, between 1962 and 2016, Boone et al. (2021) offer an important national study of the settlement schemes in Kenya. The authors illustrate the strong relationship between settlement schemes, land politics, and territorial organisation, using georeferenced data on settlement schemes. They also demonstrate the transformative nature of the purposes of settlement schemes and the ongoing effect of state territorialisation, land demand and political interests on settlement policy. In particular, this study is relevant for the current research as it sets the ground for the understanding of the settlement schemes as political-economic institutions and not merely a project of agricultural development. However, its national spatial and comparative perspective allows for further detailed historical analysis of the evolution of individual schemes since their inception. The current study fills this gap by exploring Lugari for more than half a century and mapping out the interaction between land governance and settlement patterns, and socio-economic change.

Saeteurn (2020) offers significant insights on the historical background of the Lugari Settlement Scheme and the function of settlement in addressing land pressures and joblessness in the western region of Kenya, at the local level. This is a work of importance as regards the historical conditions under which Lugari was established and the migration of settlers from overcrowded regions. But it focuses mainly on the beginnings and early evolution of the settlement, rather than its enduring change. To build on this scholarship, the present study therefore explores the developments that took place after the first parcelling of land, and how the scheme evolved as a result of demographic growth, inheritance, land subdivision, institutional transformation and livelihood shift.

The literature shows that there is a clear evolution from general theories of land settlement and agrarian transformation to Kenya's national settlement policies, which in turn leads to the early history of Lugari. However, there is an important gap yet to be addressed. There is considerable knowledge from existing scholarship on the reasons for the establishment of settlement schemes as well as the political-economic history of land allocation, but little focus has been put on the development of each scheme once it was established. The study aims to fill that void by reconstructing the process of Lugari development between 1963 and 2025 and by analysing how national land policies and political-economic processes are translated into local experiences.

Land Fragmentation, Settlement Patterns and Rural Livelihoods

Land fragmentation is a salient characteristic of agrarian transformation as it is the variation in farm size and land distribution that affects agricultural production, household security, and livelihoods in rural areas. On the international level, studies of agricultural landholding structure show that changes in farm-size structures are tightly related to processes of demography, economy and markets. However, Jayne et al. (2022) suggest that distributions of farm size in sub-Saharan Africa have been transforming significantly, not only because of the smallholder's persistence in agriculture, but also because larger farms are growing in number. Their analysis is significant, and it does so because they argue that increasing farm sizes should not be mistaken for a decline of agriculture in general, but rather a process of economic change. Large-scale comparative studies, however, cannot adequately account for the mechanisms by which individual family holdings are subdivided in specific settlement schemes in the past.

Knapman et al. (2017) illustrate at the African level the impact of land access change on rural livelihoods and the growing importance of demographic pressures, markets and new livelihood strategies in shaping land. They argue that their comparative evidence across several African countries indicates that alterations in land access can spur both intensification of farming and diversification to other non-farm activities. This applies to Lugari as the shrinking or declining size of farm areas may prompt households to look for other means of livelihood. However, the African literature in general focuses on shifts in land access at the regional or national level, and rarely offers historical perspectives on the working of the inheritance and subdivision processes within a specific settlement community.

There is more evidence in the Kenyan literature on the link between land fragmentation, population growth and agricultural livelihoods. The study by Ambwere (2003) on the Lumakanda Settlement Scheme is of particular relevance, as Lumakanda is part of a wider historical settlement pattern which spans the Lugari area. Ambwere noted that settlement land would continue to be subdivided and result in land parcels that would be too small for sustainable agriculture. The study also covers the history of Lumakanda since its early settlement days in the post-independence era, and reveals the role of migration, population growth and land subdivision in the changes in farm holdings. This work is useful for providing a local comparative basis for this study. The main focus of the report is on the policy implications of subdivision, and not on the entire trend of historical relations between land governance, settlement and socio-economic change until 2025.

The Kenyan literature thus shows that land fragmentation is not just a demographic issue. It is created by the process of interactions between inheritance practices, population growth, land markets, and household strategies and institutions. This is especially relevant in settlement schemes, where land might be divided among successive generations over the years within what are often quite small parcels. This shrinkage in the size of farms could have an impact on the viability of agriculture and at the same time promote the grafting of agricultural interests into wage work, commerce, transport, small enterprises and other non-farm sectors.

The lack of these processes being integrated into a longer historical perspective of one settlement scheme is where the gap in the literature is found. The existing research studies focus more on the agricultural or policy issue of subdivision, while the current study addresses the issue of fragmentation as a historical phenomenon of Lugari. It therefore explores the impact of changes in the spatial and socio-economic landscape of the scheme between 1963 and 2025 due to demographic change, inheritance, settlement growth and economic pressures.

Land Governance and Institutional Change

Land governance is defined as the institutions, laws, norms and practices by which land is allocated, registered, moved, administered, used and disputed. Land governance is now recognised as a practice both at international and local levels, which involves formal state institutions as well as local social actors. The case studies presented in Africa show that formal legal change does not necessarily eradicate informal practices and local institutions. Formal and informal systems are often mutually present and intertwined, especially in the context of land access, inheritance and dispute resolution.

Boone (2011) shows that the political distribution of land rights may impact political power and political conflict at the African level beyond the effects on agriculture. Her analysis is highly significant because it reveals the political nature of land governance in a context where the State has strong land powers. Knapman et al. (2017) support this view by demonstrating that in Africa, land access will have to change and that institutions must be able to adapt to the demographic, economic and livelihood shifts. The studies thus offer a conceptual underpinning for the understanding of land governance as a dynamic institutional process and not as a static administrative arrangement. The wide geographic scope of their research, however, raises issues about the nature of these institutional changes at the local level, over long historical periods.

Land governance in Kenya has undergone immense development from the colonial era to the current day. The relationship between land, state authority and customary systems has changed due to colonial law, as shown by Okoth-Ogendo (1991). Manji also reveals that in Kenya, land reform has never been settled as it is intertwined with political interests and unequal resource access through legal changes. In the same vein, Boone (2012) contends that land allocation in Kenya has also always been a politically distributive issue, where state power has been greatly influential in shaping access to land and land rights. The studies are significant in the current research in that they set the political context of land governance in Kenya. However, they mostly focus on the national institutional and political processes, and not on the development of governance arrangements within a particular settlement scheme.

The new century of the Constitution and the Acts of Parliament brought additional reforms to land governance in Kenya. The Constitution of Kenya (2010) set out certain principles on land access, security of land rights, sustainable management of land and accountability in land administration. Legislation, for example, the Land Registration Act (2012) reinforced these. These changes were institutional in the sense that they aimed to move towards more formal and decentralised land governance. Legal institutional change doesn't mean the end of local actors, however. Families, elders, chiefs, community leaders and local administrators can still have an impact on inheritance, boundary and local land claims.

Thus, the case of Kenya shows that land governance entails the interplay of formal institutions with social practices. In settlement schemes, the formal ownership structures established during the process of land allocation have a special importance because they are followed by inheritance, subdivision, family claims and local dispute-resolution mechanisms. However, Boone et al. (2021) confirm this by demonstrating that Kenyan settlement schemes have continued to be part of shifting state territorialisation policies, political pressures and local claims to land. The national analysis is useful in their understanding of the evolving institutional environment of Lugari, but it does not attempt to trace the history of internal governance of the scheme.

This study addresses this gap by studying how land governance in Lugari evolved from the early post-independence years to 2025. It traces the changes in the character of government involvement from a relatively centralised position in settlement and allocation to more complex arrangements between state agencies, the local administration, families, and community actors. The study thus does not just focus on the formal legal aspects of land governance, but also explores how land was managed, transferred, subdivided and contested in the day-to-day life of the settlement scheme.

In general, it can be concluded that the reviewed literature confirms that settlement schemes, land fragmentation and land governance are interrelated in nature. The settlement led to certain patterns of land allocation, which were then further developed by the process of demographic growth and inheritance, and were then accompanied by institutional development in response to changing land relations. Important explanations are available in the literature, and these are national and continental, but a detailed longitudinal account of Lugari is limited. This study fills that gap by developing historical evidence to trace the evolving land governance and settlement patterns and socio-economic conditions in the Lugari Settlement Scheme from 1963 to 2025.

Theoretical Framework

Political Economy Theory was used to inform this study and was employed as a framework to explore the relationship between political power and economics, institutions, social relations and control over productive resources. The theory has its origin in Karl Marx and later political economy literature that explored how political and economic institutions and structures affect the distribution, ownership and control of resources (Marx, 1970). The theory was found suitable for this study as land was the main productive factor around which the establishment, development and transformation of the Lugari Settlement Scheme revolved. The distribution, ownership, use, inheritance and fragmentation of land were not just administrative and technical matters, but were influenced by policy, institutional, economic, demographic, familial and resource claim factors.

The first proposition of the theory of Political Economy is about the relationship between political power and productive resources control. Political institutions can make rules that allocate resources, the conditions of the use of resources, and who has what rights to access resources. This proposition was immediately applicable to the study of the historical nature and land management practices of the Lugari Settlement Scheme. The establishment of Lugari was tied up in the land settlement and redistribution policy of the post-independence government, where government bodies decided who got the land to settle, who got it allocated, who got it administered and so on. The proposition thus allowed the study to explore the effects of government policies and institutions on the distribution of land at the outset of the scheme and the effects of political authority on land administration following the scheme's creation. In answering the research questions of the study, this proposition explained the role played by political decisions and government institutions in the establishment, allocation and subsequent governance of land in Lugari from 1963 to 2025 (Marx, 1970).

The second proposition relates to economic interests and competition over productive resources. Political economy theory recognises that productive resources become economic value as a source of production, accumulation and livelihood (List, 2016). Land was a fundamental means of production, household subsistence, asset accumulation and intergenerational asset transfer in Lugari. Competition for land grew more severe as population grew and agricultural land was increasingly limited, for example by inheritance, subdivision, sale, leasing and changes in land use (Shivji, 2008). This proposition was thus helpful in investigating the study's focus on shifting settlement and the monetary value of land. It facilitated an examination of the effect of economic pressures and the increasing valuation and scarcity of land on household use, occupation, transfer and subdivision of land. It also offered an insight into the reasons why residents began to diversify their livelihoods as their farms were reduced to smaller size or less profitability.

The third proposition foregrounds the importance of institutions in controlling access to and the control of productive resources. Political Economy Theory says that rules are set up and sanctioned by institutions that influence ownership and distribution of resources (Laffont, 2000). In the context of Lugari, land governance involved more than formal government agencies. It included land administration institutions, local government systems, local administrators, families, elders and other community actors, both formal and informal, involved in decisions on access to, use and control over land (Streeck, 2011) . The study examined changes in land governance over time, directly informed by this proposition. It allowed the study to follow the process of decentralisation in a formerly centralised system of settlement and land administration to a more complex one that included statutory institutions, local administrative structures, households, and community-based mechanisms. The proposition thus helped provide an answer to the question of how the land governance institutions and practices in Lugari changed since the inception of the scheme up to 2025 and how this change impacted access and control of land.

The fourth proposition is related to social relations, unequal interests and conflicts between different groups in relation to access to productive resources. Political Economy Theory proposes that resources are contained within social networks and that the contestation over resources' use and ownership may cause conflicts between social groups, institutions and individuals, within households and within societies (Korf, 2005). Possession and fragmentation of land, boundary disputes, and the dynamics of household relations in Lugari were issues of special importance in the study. The relationship between population growth, customary family practices and shrinking farm size became more important as lands were passed to successive generations and channelled to the family members (Long, 1997). The hypothesis was therefore that the impact of these new changes in access and ownership would have an impact on relationships within and between families, add to boundary disputes and change patterns of settlement. It was also able to account for the relationships between the efforts to acquire and hold land and the wider social and economic concerns in the settlement.

The fifth proposition deals with the changes in political-economic relations in history. Political Economy Theory does not fix political institutions, economic interests or social relations. Rather, these relationships are transformed when societies grow in population, undergo institutional adjustment, undergo economic change and face shifts in expectations for the use of resources (Inglehart, 2020). The proposition was especially relevant given that the study was conducted in a historical timeframe (1963-2025). It offered an analytical framework by which to consider the political and economic circumstances under which the founders of Lugari came across as compared to later generations of settlers (Greenfield, 2009). It also contributed to a better understanding of the change from the initial settlement pattern to more fragmented land ownership, changing land use, livelihood diversification and changing land administration (Greenfield, 2009). The proposition allowed the study to consider the wider issue of the scope of the historical change of Lugari in relation to the changes in the political, economic, institutional and demographic field throughout the study period.

These propositions, together, offered an analytical framework for understanding the historical development of the Lugari Settlement Scheme. The proposition concerning political power allowed the study to address the role of government in settlement and the allocation of land; the proposition on economic interest allowed the study to view the competition for land and the changing livelihoods of the settlers; the proposition on institutions allowed the study to explain the changes in land governance; the proposition on social relations allowed the study to explain the inheritance processes, fragmentation and conflicts that arose in relation to land; and the proposition on historical change allowed the study to examine the processes across the entire period from 1963 to 2025 (Boone, 2012). The theory consequently linked the key themes of the study (the settlement scheme, land governance, changing settlement patterns, land fragmentation, and socio-economic transformation) in the same analytical framework (Peters, 2004). The results were then understood as a result of changing political, economic, institutional and social negotiations over and with a productive resource that was still significant to life in Lugari.

The Political Economy Theory also influenced the selection of the sources, the periodisation and analysis of the study. Sources were chosen to document evidence of political decisions, land allocation, institutional practices, economic interests, social relations, and land ownership and land use changes, including oral interviews, focus group discussions, archival records and documentary sources (Cotula et al., 2004). The timeframe 1963 – 2025 was selected to follow the evolution from the inception of the Lugari Settlement Scheme, through changes in land tenure and settlement patterns and socio-economic conditions. The evidence was analysed in terms of the interaction between political power, economic interests, institutions and social relations to influence access to, control over and use of land, and to understand their evolution over time.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The study used a historical research design that was appropriate as it aimed to reconstruct and interpret changes in land governance, settlement patterns and socio-economic conditions over an extended historical period. The design allowed the researcher to consider how things were ongoing and how things had changed, as well as to link past events, institutional change and community experiences, without just describing their current situation. The study was conducted in the following wards, namely Lugari, Chekalini, Lumakanda and Mautuma, which are the main areas that are associated with the Lugari settlement area and have different settlement patterns, farming practices, land subdivision and socio-economic activities. The inclusion of these areas therefore provided the geographical and historical diversity that was needed to understand the evolution of the settlement scheme.

Oral interviews, three focus group discussions (FGDs) and documentary sources were used as tools in data collection. Oral interviews provided first-hand recollections and personal experiences of changes in land allocation, ownership, inheritance, governance and livelihoods. FGDs were used to enable a collective reflection and comparison of community experiences, and documentary sources were used to give historical and institutional support to the oral sources for corroboration and context. This was achieved by triangulation, both by drawing on evidence from various sources and by strengthening the study by comparing and critically interpreting evidence from various sources. Purposive and snowball sampling were used to select participants. The community members, local leaders, opinion leaders and people with historical knowledge were purposively selected due to their first-hand experience, institutional status or specialised knowledge in the development of Lugari. A subsequent sampling technique known as snowball sampling was then employed to find more individuals with knowledge of the history relevant to the research that could add to the information or validate previous accounts. This technique improved the quality of the evidence gathered, making it more meaningful and in-depth.

Data analysis consisted of both thematic and chronological data analysis. The thematic analysis comprised themes like land allocation, land governance, agriculture, inheritance, land fragmentation, land dispute and socio-economic transformation. These themes were then placed in the time period 1963-2025 through chronological analysis, allowing the continuity, change and turning points to be identified throughout the various historical periods. Both methods were applied simultaneously to compare evidence between time periods, to look for patterns and contradictions and to look for relationships between the political, the institutional, the economic and the social. This process also improved the methodological quality of the research by promoting thematically consistent as well as historically contextualised results. The study was conducted under the principles of ethics such as informed consent, voluntary participation in the study, confidentiality and respect for participants.

In addition, the researcher used triangulation techniques with both oral interviews and FGDs, and documentary evidence to ensure the credibility of the findings, corroborating, contextualising and analysing historical accounts critically.

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings are discussed based on the set objectives of the study and analysed using systematic triangulation of oral interviews, focus group discussions, archival records, documentary evidence and appropriate scholarly literature. This is not a descriptive presentation of findings but rather a discussion that purposefully introduces the voice of the researcher into the analysis through the interrogation of areas of convergence, variation, continuity and change. The evidence is then analysed using a lens of Political Economy Theory, focusing on its merits in understanding the connection between political power, control of productive forces, conflicting economic interests, institutional power, and evolving social relations.

Establishment and Historical Development of the Lugari Settlement Scheme

The Establishment of Lugari and the Politics of Land Allocation

The study revealed that the creation of the Lugari Settlement Scheme was not a one-off administrative measure, but rather it was a component of the general political and economic reorganisation of land ownership that took place during Kenya's movement from colonialism to independence. The history of settlement development shows that access to settlement land was not based on competitive occupation but rather on formal government processes. Specifically, KNA file DC/KMG/2/1/13, Land Development and Settlement Scheme, Lugari SS: Applications, and AGR/1/10/6/4 (1963-1965) contain records of applications submitted and administrative processes for considering applicants for land settlement. These records reflect the ongoing significance of government control in granting land for settlement and the conditions of its administration. Lugari thus falls into the larger context of post-independence land redistribution and African resettlement carried out by the state.

However, the archival record should not be read as implying that access to land was automatically or equally granted to all Africans. Eligibility was established via an application and approval process, as these procedures suggest. As a result, access to settlement opportunities may be delayed or denied to some prospective applicants. The evidence of the existence of a controlled selection process is stronger in the available documents than for the social composition of those excluded. Therefore, it would not be reasonable to assert, without supporting documentation, that there was systematic exclusion of particular ethnic, gender or socio-economic groups. Even so, there was a formal application system that gave rise to unequal access, as it was discretionary in terms of processing and approval of applications. This is a more salient point if seen in conjunction with the oral and FGD evidence.

Samuel Amugune said that the acquisition of land was not automatic, as prospective settlers needed to be reviewed first to be approved before they could be given land in some instances and had to wait for long periods before they received land. He also remembered that chiefs and local administrative authorities had influence on the application process: "He recalled that chiefs and local administrative authorities had an influence on the application process (Oral interview with Samuel Amugune Matete, Location, Lugari Sub-County, Kakamega County, March 2025). His testimony gives a local perspective which is largely missing from the administrative records. Although formal procedures are found in the archival records, this account demonstrates that the process of doing business with them required participation in local administrative structures as well. The evidence thus suggests a difference between formal qualification and practical access: the process of gaining access to settlement land was not necessarily a simple one for those with the requisite qualifications.

This is supported by the FGD data. The participants in the focus group, which was convened at Mzee Muzembi's home, said that the government was instrumental in distributing land, but also complained that some local governments favoured specific people in the selection process. This felt favouritism was related to local considerations and personal interests of those to be benefited (FGD of Original settlers and their descendants, Mzee Muzembi's Homestead, Lugari, 26th June, 2026). Collective memories on their own do not necessarily prove the degree of exclusion, but when they coincide with people's testimonies, they are historically important. Both these sources point to the relationships of influence, discretion and unequal access with which the formal state allocation system was experienced locally.

The merging of archival, oral and FGD evidence therefore leads to a more detailed understanding of land allocation in Lugari. The merging of archival, oral and FGD evidence thus generates a refined picture of land allocation in Lugari. The government had formal authority over applications and settlement processes, and the oral evidence and FGD responses help to provide an insight into how the settlement processes were experienced and negotiated by prospective settlers. These two types of evidence, then, do not necessarily contradict each other. Instead, they show various aspects of the same process. Documentary evidence can be helpful for establishing institutional norms, dates and administrative decisions, but for informal norms and informal assessments of fairness and the influence of local actors, oral evidence may be more helpful.

Political Economy analysis is analytically significant because access to the main productive resource in Lugari, land, was not only regulated formally through administrative processes, but also through political authority. The question here, then, was less one of whether land was allocated by the state, and more one of how the state used its power, who was able to manipulate the allocation system, who was advanced, and who was not advanced, and whether there was any impact from local power relationships. Similarly, Boone et al. (2021) show how Kenya's settlement schemes were linked to broader processes of state formation, territorial organisation and political interests. The Lugari evidence also suggests a local-level analysis of the national settlement policies: how these policies were negotiated within administrative structures and community power relations.

The researcher thus proposes that Lugari's basis of access and power was a melding of formal state authority and locally-mediated power. From an institutional perspective, the settlement framework was set up by government institutions, applications were submitted to them, and eligibility and allocation decisions were made. Locally, chiefs, administrators, and influential individuals have the potential to influence prospective settlers' experiences navigating that framework. The evidence suggests that unequal access may exist, but is not sufficient to establish the systematic exclusion of any particular social group; thus, this finding is more tentatively stated: unequal access may exist as a result of the local power relations and administrative decisions. This is significant, as this would otherwise give a stronger sense of systematic exclusion than the evidence suggests.

The creation of the town of Lugari was, therefore, an economic and political process. The state wanted to redistribute and restructure productive land, but this was effected through institutions and social relations in which power played a role. Political Economy Theory can be useful in this regard because it focuses our analysis not on the formal pattern of land allocation, but on the pattern of relations between political authority, administrative institutions and competing interests regarding productive resources. The Lugari settlement system started with the state having a commanding position in the allocation of land, and access to the position being determined by the administrative and social dynamics at the local level.

From Government-Controlled Land to Individual Ownership

The study also found that the character of the connection between settlers and land has changed greatly after the initial allocation period. According to Samuel Amugune, the land previously was under government control, but then was registered to individual settlers. He added that the transition from unregistered to registered land transformed people's perceptions of land ownership, with the registered land now regarded as private land (Oral interview with Samuel Amugune, Matete Location, Lugari Sub-County, Kakamega County, March 2025). This testimony is important because it provides a perfect example of how state control of access was replaced by individualised ownership. The researcher reads Amugune's account as an indicator of a significant change in structure. In the early years, it was the responsibility of the state to provide land, and settlers used it to get land. However, as time went on, individual households' rights of control in the registration process increased.

The FGD of original settlers and their descendants also noted the transition from state-controlled land allocation to individual control of land (FGD of Original Settlers and Their Descendants, Mzee Muzembi's Homestead, Lugari, June 26, 2026). Taken together, the oral account and the evidence point to the transformation that occurred with the shift to private ownership, a transformation that was more than legal – it was a shift in the settlers' thinking about the security of their economies and their family futures. The researcher's perspective is particularly marked at this juncture in terms of Political Economy Theory. The theory states that the transfer of productive resources can lead to a change in the social and economic relations. Once landed, land was no longer just for immediate cultivation, but became a resource for future use. It more and more became a family asset, an economic security, and then a source of inheritance, commercialisation, and competition.

The researcher therefore claims that there was a historical contradiction in the process of individualisation. The title, to a certain degree, provided the settler with security of tenure and enabled them to make permanent homes. At the same time, the mechanism set the stage for subsequent fragmentation since the land was in individual ownership, and therefore could be passed on to descendants. This corresponds to the general discussion on land tenure in Kenya. The privatisation of land rights had a significant impact on social relations of land ownership and access, as shown in Okoth-Ogendo (1991). Similarly, Manji (2020) shows that there has been a conflict between formal legal rights and social claims, and conflicting economic interests in the light of still ongoing land reforms. The researcher therefore concludes that the registration of land was indeed one of the most significant events in the history of Lugari, which cannot be denied. It provided settlers with security, but it also transformed land into an economic and inheritable property, and more and more people would question land ownership.

Consolidation, Agricultural Development and Community Institutionalisation, 1971–1978

Transforming Allocated Land into Productive Family Holdings

The results show that after the first land assignment, the main historical issue became that of land productivity. The evidence indicates that settlers began to gradually clear their farms, to build permanent

homesteads and to start planting food crops. Merisa Etebe remembered that the settlers had to dedicate much effort to clearing their land, constructing their homes and growing crops to feed their families (Oral interview with Merisa Etebe, Mukuyu Village, Lugari Sub-County, Kakamega County, May 18, 2025).
Etebe's testimony is evidence that land allocation did not necessarily lead to development. The researcher's view of the importance of the settlement programme was a function of what settlers did with the land set allotments. The shift from land to productive farms involved a process of labour, household organisation, and ongoing investments. This is complemented by the overall background of how agriculture developed in Kenya in the 1970s in the oral evidence. Increased agricultural production, food security and participation of smallholder farmers in the national economy were highlighted through government development policies (Republic of Kenya, 1970).

In addition, the contrapuntal reading of Etebe's evidence and the government's development policies reinforces the notion that Lugari's agricultural consolidation was a result of both household enterprise and a broader development agenda of the government. But the researcher says the two forces shouldn't be considered as equal. Though the general direction was set by government policy, the settlement's transformation was largely due to the efforts of the average settler.

It is here that the power of Political Economy Theory is most valuable. The theory puts special stress on the importance of the social labour and organisation of productive resources for creating economic value. Proper utilisation of land was not enough to change the livelihoods of the Lugari people. It had to be cleared, cultivated, developed and added to household production. Based on this, the researcher argues that the early economic progress of Lugari is not the direct result of government allocation of land. The settlers were active historical agents who made land productive. This is an interpretation that allows agency to the settlers rather than making them passive recipients of the state policy.

Agriculture, Markets and the Integration of Lugari into the Wider Economy

The results additionally show that agriculture continued as the backbone of the early socio-economic development of the Lugari. Settlers are seen to have grown food crops, especially maize, and over time adopted permanent farming practices, as shown by oral evidence (Oral interview with Merisa Etebe, Mukuyu Village, Lugari Sub-County, Kakamega County, 18 May 2025). The development of agriculture was accompanied by the growth of local markets and trading centres. In the documentary and narrative records, there is strong evidence that the farmers had an increasing need for markets, in which they could sell their produce and purchase necessities. This growth of local trading centres thus involved the growth of Lugari farmers' economic ties to the regional and national economic networks.

This change from the researcher's point of view is not limited to the development of trade. It represented a bigger change in the political economy of the settlement. Lugari was slowly moving from being an emerging new settlement, based on land allocation, to a viable rural economy that was linked to markets and other economic systems. Political Economy Theory is a good lens to examine this phenomenon, in that it focuses on the connection between production and exchange. Settlers started out making just enough to consume, but with the growth of markets, some surpluses could be produced and traded. The economic concept of land thus changed from subsistence production to involvement in broader market relations.

The researcher also recognises that the social value of land was altered with the development of markets. The value of land to provide food for a family grew, but so also did its value as a source of income. Later, this new commercial value would be of significance in land commercialisation and conflicts.

Community Agency and the Development of Social Institutions

The study also revealed that the church and school construction, building of roads and other community institutions were part of the process that contributed to the consolidation of Lugari. Evidence of oral history and collective memory shows that the settlement was slowly being seen as more than a temporary government initiative and as a permanent settlement. The FGD participants particularly emphasised the need for community in the development of local infrastructure. It was recalled that in many cases the roads and other infrastructure was the result of community effort as state authorities did not always respond to the immediate needs of the settlers (FGD of Original Settlers and Their Descendants, Mzee Muzembi's Homestead, Lugari, 26th June 2026).

This evidence adds an interesting aspect of triangulation since it would affect a state-centred explanation of the development of Lugari. Previous studies showed the state has been controlling the allocation of land. The community's evidence, however, showed that community members were increasingly involved in the responsibility for some aspects of local development post-settlement. The researcher considers this movement towards more community voice to be evidence. Development did not occur in a simple fashion in Lugari, imposed from above through some state policy. It was also constructed, from scratch, through action, labour and organisation at the community and household level.

The theory of political economy confirms this reading, which underlies the understanding of the importance of social groups for the organisation of the economy and institutions. The government did not treat settlers as victims, although it wielded political power. They organised labour and social networks in their own interest and for better living conditions. The researcher consequently suggests that Lugard's consolidation was a negotiated one between the state and the agency of the people. The state provided social, economic and administrative support, and the settlers helped to shape the settlement on their own terms.

This interpretation is significant, especially in terms of the ability of the researcher's voice to go beyond a mere binary conclusion that either the state or the community was responsible for the development of Lugari. The facts, rather, pointed to a dynamic pattern with both actors acting in significant but changing roles.

Land Fragmentation and Changing Settlement Patterns

Population Growth and the Fragmentation of Family Land

The study concluded that one of the most important long-term changes in Lugari was the progressive subdivision of the rather substantial farms initially granted to the settlers. Oral evidence suggests that the importance of land fragmentation grew as families grew and multiple generations were living and working on the same land originally farmed. Oral evidence indicates that the population growth and inheritance resulted in a growing pressure on land. What previously had been sufficient to sustain a family was expected to sustain the family, their children, and their grandchildren. The researcher considers this process to be a basic historical change, as the problem of Lugari went from the lack of land in the early settlement period to the lack of land in the later generations.

This interpretation is supported by the FGD evidence. Participants linked the evolving nature of settlement to an increase in descendants, as well as the ongoing process of dividing the land among family members (FGD of Original Settlers and Their Descendants, Mzee Muzembi's Homestead, Lugari, June 26, 2026). A comparison of the oral evidence and the overall discussion implies that the fragmentation of land was not simply an individual household phenomenon but a structural one that impacted the settlement. This finding, the researcher claims, reflects one of the significant strengths of Political Economy Theory: its ability to account for the contradictions which arise as a result of the transformation of ownership relations. Security and economic opportunity were originally provided by individual ownership. But with expanding populations, the same privately owned land became increasingly hard to partition without diminishing the size and yields of the land parcels.

This is the main contradiction in the history of Lugari. Landlessness was first tackled as a policy, but the challenge was compounded by the fact that land was not growing at the same rate as those claiming rights to it. Thus the researcher argues that fragmentation of the land is not a "demographic problem". It was also a problem of political economy because of the relation between a scarce factor of production (in this case land) and private ownership, inheritance, and population growth. Studies of land ownership in Lugari and western Kenya show that alterations in land ownership and subdivision have had significant socio-economic impacts (Esese, 2009), supporting this interpretation. The local evidence and scholarly interpretation converge to reinforce the conclusion that fragmentation was a key process in the historical transformation of the settlement.

Changing Spatial Organisation and Settlement Density

Slowly, the landscape of Lugari changed because of the fragmentation of land. Oral history sources suggest that neighbourhoods with low concentrations of households subsequently saw a rise in the number of households. The researcher sees this change as proof that settlement patterns were dynamic in the past. Lugari was not geographically determined after the first allocation of plots. Rather, the number of families living in certain places was in a constant state of flux due to family formation, inheritance, and subdivision.

This interpretation is supported by the collective evidence from the FGD. Participants associated increasing settlement density with the subdivision of original family land (FGD of Original Settlers and Their Descendants, Mzee Muzembi's Homestead, Lugari, June 26, 2026). This theme was repeated in multiple individual and collective sources, affirming the finding. Political Economy Theory looks at the spatial structure of Lugari from the standpoint of the changing relations of control and distribution of land. Sub-dividing land did not just involve the physical act of making smaller plots. It was a result of family members negotiating their rights to access productive resources, inheritance and economics. The researcher thus suggests that the altered settlement pattern was an obvious sign of their underlying social and economic changes within the households. Smaller plots, growing homesteads and greater settlement density were indicative of shifting intergenerational relations and competing claims on land.

Commercialisation of Land and Changing Economic Relations

The study found that land in Lugari gradually acquired increasing commercial value as roads, markets, schools and other infrastructure and services developed. However, commercialisation did not take a single form. The evidence indicates four interconnected processes: land sales, land leasing, commercial farming and speculative holding. Land sales transformed land into an exchangeable asset through which households could realise immediate financial returns. Leasing enabled owners to generate income while retaining formal ownership, particularly where households lacked sufficient labour or capital to utilise all their land. Commercial farming increased the productive and monetary value of land by shifting some holdings from predominantly subsistence production towards market-oriented agriculture. Speculative holding, on the other hand, involved retaining land because of expectations that its value would increase as settlement, infrastructure and economic activity expanded. These processes demonstrate that land in Lugari increasingly acquired both use value and exchange value.

Oral evidence indicates that this transformation was experienced differently within the community. Some residents continued to regard land primarily as a source of food, household security and inheritance, whereas others increasingly viewed it as an economic asset that could be sold, leased or commercially utilised. The FGD participants similarly observed that rising land values influenced decisions concerning land use and ownership (FGD of Original Settlers and Their Descendants, Mzee Muzembi's Homestead, Lugari, 26 June 2026). The convergence of these accounts suggests that commercialisation did not simply replace subsistence use; rather, it introduced an additional economic logic into existing social understandings of land.

The economic benefits of commercialisation, however, were unevenly distributed. Landowners with relatively large or strategically located holdings were better positioned to benefit from sales, leasing and commercial agriculture. Households possessing capital, labour or access to markets could also derive greater returns from commercial farming. By contrast, households with smaller or fragmented holdings had fewer opportunities to benefit from commercialisation and could become increasingly dependent on leasing, off-farm employment or the sale of portions of their land. Those who sold land could obtain immediate financial resources, but such transactions could also reduce their long-term access to an important productive asset. Similarly, younger generations who depended on inherited land could find that earlier sales or subdivisions had reduced the amount of land available to them. Commercialisation therefore created both winners and losers, depending on the size of holdings, access to capital, timing of transactions and position within household inheritance structures.

The evidence from Fridah Ndote further demonstrates the relationship between increasing land value and changing ownership relations. She associated the changing value of land with subdivision and disputes over ownership (Oral interview with Fridah Ndote, Lugari, 15 June 2026). Her testimony suggests that as land became increasingly valuable, decisions concerning its ownership and use acquired greater economic consequences. Whereas land used primarily for household cultivation could be negotiated within the framework of family subsistence, the prospect of income from selling, leasing or commercially exploiting land introduced competing interests concerning who had the authority to make decisions and who should benefit from the resulting income.

Commercialisation consequently intensified intergenerational and neighbourhood disputes. Within families, disagreements could arise between parents and children over whether inherited land should be retained, subdivided, leased or sold. Older generations could prioritise land retention as a source of security and inheritance, while younger family members could view land as an asset capable of generating capital for education, business or other investments. At the neighbourhood level, increasing land values heightened the economic significance of boundaries and ownership claims. Disagreements over boundaries, access routes, occupation and transactions therefore had greater financial implications where the disputed land had acquired substantial market value. Commercialisation thus did not merely change land prices; it altered the stakes attached to land-related decisions and disputes.

From the perspective of Political Economy Theory, this transformation demonstrates how changes in the economic value of a productive resource can reshape social relations and patterns of power. Land continued to perform its traditional productive and social functions, but its increasing exchange value introduced new incentives for accumulation, investment and competition. The commercialisation of land therefore produced a dual relationship with the resource: it remained a means of household reproduction while simultaneously becoming a commodity through which wealth could be accumulated. Those with greater land, capital, information or bargaining power were better positioned to benefit, while households with limited assets faced greater pressure to subdivide, lease or sell.

The researcher therefore argues that commercialisation represented a significant transformation in the political economy of Lugari. Land sales, leasing, commercial farming and speculative holding progressively expanded the economic functions of land beyond subsistence production. Although these processes created opportunities for investment and income generation, their benefits were uneven and contributed to new forms of economic differentiation. More importantly, the rising economic value of land intensified competition over ownership, inheritance, use and boundaries, thereby linking commercialisation directly to intergenerational and neighbourhood conflicts. The historical transformation of Lugari was consequently characterised not simply by increasing land values, but by a fundamental change in the economic relationships through which residents understood, controlled and contested land.

Land Disputes and the Interaction Between Formal and Informal Governance

The study has determined that the division and commercialisation of land was a factor in land use, inheritance, division and boundary disputes. Oral evidence showed that there were some conflicts that arose in families and others arose between neighbours. Fridah Ndote's oral testimony showed that disagreements over the division and utilisation of land might emerge amongst family members as well as from one generation to the next (Oral interview with Fridah Ndote, Lugari, 15 June 2026). The researcher posits that these conflicts need not be considered as isolated incidents. Rather, they were expressions of underlying historical shifts in land relations. With land becoming scarce and more valuable for business purposes, the conflicts of claims became more complex to deal with.

Additionally, informal dispute resolution methods are demonstrated to be significant as well. Oral histories suggest that many residents chose to go to elders for mediation in the case of disputes involving boundaries and ownership. It is important because it indicates that formal land institutions never took the place of community-based authority. The researcher has now concluded that the ongoing relevance of the authority of the elders was proof of institutional pluralism in land governance in Lugari.

Theoretically, it is acceptable that the theory of state and local institutions is intertwined because it is grounded in Political Economy Theory. The theory also allows the researcher to investigate local sites of power and authority that affect access to and control of productive resources, as well as formal political institutions. Thus, the researcher suggests that the governance of land in Lugari was through a negotiated institutional system. Government officials and/or land administrators had formal legal powers, and elders and community leaders had social legitimacy and influence in resolving disputes.

The oral evidence suggests that political authorities at times became involved in land disputes, particularly when there existed more general political issues over land. Another concern mentioned by respondents, however, was the potential for more disagreements to occur, given the political pressure. This is another testimony of the political aspect of land, in the eyes of the researcher. Political Economy Theory is particularly relevant in that respect, for it can help to shed light on the reasons why land conflicts can attract political interest. The control of land is linked to wealth, social status and community influence. Political actors could then be interested in land conflicts, as decisions on or interventions in conflicts can create political legitimation. The scholar concludes that there are limits to political intervention, however, based on the evidence presented from Lugari. There was a need for local legitimacy, as well as for formal processes of conflict resolution provided by political authority. This is why we see many of the residents still relying on elders and community institutions.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: As a result, the study concludes that the historical evolution of the Lugari Settlement Scheme (1963-2025) was the outcome of the interplay of political power, land governance, population growth, economic interests and community agency. Lugari started as a settlement under a government land reform programme that aimed to address the problem of landlessness and support African smallholder farming, but over time it emerged as a complex rural settlement with dispersed land ownership, agricultural production, growing markets, institutional development and diverse livelihoods. Population growth, inheritance, land subdivision and the commercialisation of land, however, gradually broke up the original holdings, causing the farms to become smaller and smaller, changing settlement patterns, boundary disputes and more competition for land. The study also finds that land governance in Lugari was pluralistic, with formal government and families, elders and community-based mechanisms. The study reveals, through Political Economy Theory, how access to land, control over land, and competition for land were closely linked to Political Power, Economic Interest, Social Relations, and Institutional Change. The historical development of Lugari provides a valuable case study in the successes and ongoing challenges of Kenya's post-independence settlement schemes, and the importance of sustainable land management and rural development.

Recommendations: The study calls on national and county governments, land administration institutions, and local communities to develop robust sustainable land governance mechanisms in order to tackle the rising issues of land fragmentation, inheritance, boundary disputes, and agricultural land holdings in Lugari. Alternative livelihoods, modern and intensive agricultural methods and income-generating activities which can help alleviate overreliance on ever smaller plots of land need to be encouraged. Land administration agencies should also improve land-use planning, land registration services, and dispute resolution frameworks and acknowledge the complementary role of elders, families and community institutions in addressing local land disputes. Further, public awareness programmes need strengthening to raise awareness among households about sustainable land management, succession planning and the potential dysfunctionality of unmanaged subdivision. Lastly, comparative historical research on Lugari and other settlement schemes in Kenya should be conducted to identify general trends in the processes of post-independence land reform, settlement transformation and socio-economic change in the rural areas.

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