

Soil conservation campaigns and economic transformation in colonial Sukumaland: a case study of Kishapu district, 1930-1960

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This study aimed to examine soil conservation campaigns and economic transformation in colonial Sukumaland from 1930 to 1960, using Kishapu District as a case study. It had three specific objectives: to examine the indigenous Sukuma farming system prior to the introduction of colonial soil conservation campaigns, to examine the influence of colonial soil conservation campaigns on indigenous Sukuma farming system, and to analyze the impact of colonial soil conservation campaigns on the indigenous communities in the district. The study has used archival documents, secondary materials, and oral recollections to understand colonial soil conservation campaigns and transformation among the Sukuma of Kishapu. This study has come up with three main findings. The first finding notes that livestock keeping and crop cultivation were the economic mainstays of the Sukuma in Kishapu district before the initiation of colonial soil conservation in the 1930s. They practiced shifting cultivation for ecological and cultural factors and they kept livestock that complemented farming. Agricultural activities were done by using human labour, using hand hoes. Agricultural products such as millet, sorghum, cattle and dairy were used as food, source of wealth and played other social roles. The second finding is that the initiation of colonial soil conservation had major influences on the indigenous farming system in Kishapu. Peasants started to make ridges, use manure and inoculate their cattle. New tools such as tractors and ox-ploughs came into use. Soil conservation went hand in hand with promotion of cotton and sunflower growing for the market, including the growth of trees and grasses as anti-erosion measures. The third finding uncovers the socio-economic consequences of soil conservation in Kishapu, which included change in labour relations, creation of peasant societies, roads construction, increased incomes, adultery, and alcoholism. Contrary to Nationalist and Marxist works that have focused on peasant resistance to colonial soil conservation, this study adds another dimension by highlighting socio-

economic opportunities that peasants tapped to improve livelihood in the context of soil conservation programmes.