

# The Changing Practices of *Kibarua* Employment: A Case Study of the Sagara, Tanzania

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**Abstract:** This article analyzes the process in which the "economy of affection" in rural Africa transforms the nature of wage labor and thereby induces a phenomenon we may call "communal sharing of cash" among African peasants, through a case study of Sagara society in Tanzania. In Sagara society, which is now deeply involved in the money economy, a form of wage labor employment (called *kibarua* in Swahili) is frequently arranged by the rich at the request of the poor for cash. Contrary to the general view that wage labor is evidence of rural differentiation, *kibarua* reproduces an egalitarian world within the society by functioning as an effective social leveling mechanism.

## Introduction

The purpose of this article is to describe the cultural characteristics of *kibarua* from the point of view of the life structure of the peasants and the relationship that exists between the employer of *kibarua* and the laborer as a *kibarua* him/herself. The presence of wage labor in peasant societies in Africa has to a certain degree been highlighted in previous studies, such as those of Kasfir and Hanzawa.<sup>1</sup> The phenomenon of wage labor, together with the phenomenon of peasant differentiation, have been regarded as some of the contributing factors towards the penetration of capitalism into the African peasantry.<sup>2</sup>

Hyden, however, commented on the uniqueness of African capitalism, from the point of view of the differences between advanced and less advanced societies.<sup>3</sup> Firstly, the peasant differentiation phenomenon in advanced countries is basically supported by the differentiation of private land holding in contrast to the communal land holding system found in many societies of Africa.<sup>4</sup> Secondly, differentiation within the African peasantry remains at a low level, even in the most capitalist societies of Africa, e.g. Kenya.<sup>5</sup> Thus, African capitalism can't be equated with that of capitalism found in advanced countries.

It is important to consider not only the presence of wage labor and peasant differentiation but also to look at a society's cultural attributes. Studies focusing on the life structure and the value system of the peasants have been carried out in southeast Asia, for example by Geertz and Scott.<sup>6</sup> There are fewer such studies, however, with specific reference to Africa. My study was carried out to fill this gap by examining the *kibarua* concept as a wage labor arrangement among the Sagara people and explore its social, economic, and cultural significance.

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<http://www.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v9/v9i1-2a6.pdf>

The next section covers the general characteristic of the contemporary dynamics of the peasant economy in Sagara society before I proceed to analyze the *kibarua* phenomenon. The third section discusses the implications for the life structure of the peasant. In the conclusion, I address the issue of the extent to which the African peasantry is unique.<sup>7</sup>

## REGIONAL SUBSISTENCE AND CASH ECONOMY

### Description of the study area

Morogoro region, in which the Sagara community is found, has a population of 1,222,237 people, in five districts with 458 villages. Annual rainfall in this region ranges from 600mm to 1200mm. Kilosa is one of the districts in Morogoro region located at about fifty km from Morogoro town center (see Map 1). While the northern part of Kilosa district is dominated by the Kaguru ethnic group, the southern part is occupied by the Sagara people. The Mkudi and Chogoali rivers divide Sagaraland from Kaguruland to the northeast. Sagaraland is lower and hotter with more rain than Kaguruland.

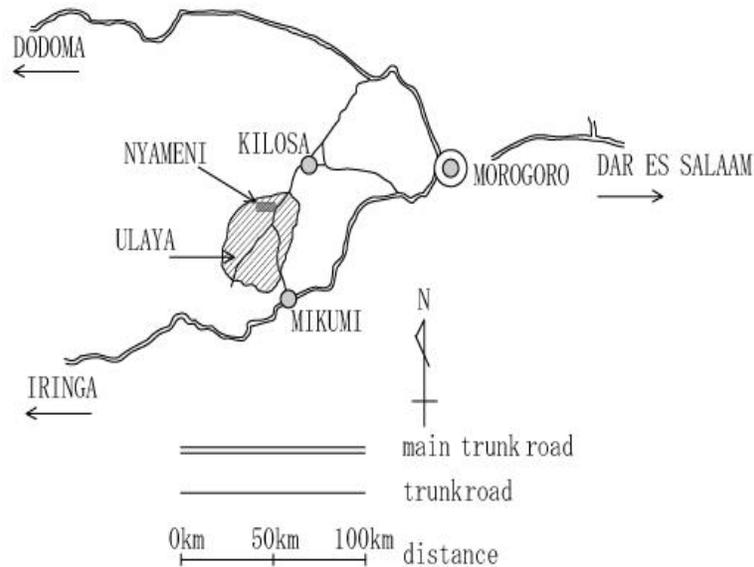
Given these different ecological conditions, the Kaguru people are found to have many cattle (and mainly indigenous breed) while the Sagara people traditionally keep small animals such as goats. This difference has made them experience different lifestyles. However, despite such differences, both of them are truly agricultural people dependent upon the cultivation of staple food crops like maize, compared to the people surrounding them, namely the Masai and Gogo who live in drier areas.

Nyameni village, one of the villages of Ulaya division in Kilosa district of Sagaraland was selected as the site for this study (see Fig.1). This village is located along the main road from Mikumi to Kilosa. According to the 1988 population census, the population of Ulaya division was 10,107 people and Nyameni village was 2,188.

### Subsistence agriculture in Nyameni

Nyameni village is located near Morogoro town and from the point of view of transportation is very convenient for commercial agriculture production. There are many plantations along the main road and these have attracted many immigrants who have subsequently intermingled with the indigenous people.

Fig.1. Outline of the Study field



**Fig 1**

Ethnicity	Number of persons	Rate
Sagara	22	(58%)
Goni	6	(16%)
Kaguru	3	( 8%)
Luguru	2	( 5%)
Nyakusa	1	( 3%)
Gigua	1	( 3%)
Others	2	( 7%)

**Table 1.** Ethnicity of Inhabitants in Sagara Community -in the case of 38 persons in Nyameni

Fig.1 shows the distribution of the people according to ethnicity. According to Table 1, forty two percent of the people interviewed had immigrated from other areas. Among the immigrants are the Goni, Kaguru, and Luguru. Generally, Sagaraland is regarded as the most suitable area for cultivation in Tanzania. Most of the immigrants not only come from nearby areas like Ukaguru and Uluguru, but also from far away areas like Goni and Ugogo. They came to this area in order to look for agricultural field.

In spite of the availability of arable land, someone living far from the main road faces transportation difficulties, as there is no person in that village with a truck. They are dependent on traders from the urban area and other neighboring villages to transport their goods to the market. A poor transport system and low prices for agricultural products (which they cannot control, as they are mainly determined by the world market) have discouraged the Sagara people from expanding their agricultural fields. An example is the fall of price of cotton, which the government had earlier encouraged. For this reason peasants value and prefer to stick to their subsistence agricultural production.

As a testimony to the above, one immigrant of the Sukuma origin pointed out as follows, "Sagaraland is fertile and people could extend the scale of their agriculture if they want to but they don't want to extend the field. Instead of expanding their agricultural field, they accept immigrants generously."

The Sagara type of agriculture is an example of shifting-cultivation in the *miombo* forests of equatorial Africa. Traditionally, it is characterized by the opening up of new fields in the original forest and the use of long-term fallow. Land availability, however, has decreased year by year, and recently peasants keep the same land under cultivation for several years, in some instances for more than twenty years. Another recent feature of land use in Sagaraland is the practice of farming on different plots that are separated from each other. On average, peasants manage three to four plots per household. In Nyameni village, while most peasants have plots in the low lands, as it is more suitable for rice production, some peasants have farm plots on the slopes of the hill under the slash and burn system of agriculture.

Dimension s (acre)	person s	%	Combination of Crop	Frequenc y	Item/da y	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1.0	2	(5%)	Maize+ kidney bean +cassava	R	Salt	10 0	10 0	10 0	10 0	5 0	50	50		
1.5	2	(5%)	Maize+ kidney bean+banana	R	Sugari	40 0	10 0	10 0	10 0		10 0	20 0	20 0	
2.0	14	(37%)	Maize+ kidney bean	CC	Soap	27 0					70			
2.5	2	(5%)	Maize+ cassava	C	Oil	10 0	60	15	15		45			
3.0	1	(18%)	Maize+rice	C	Tomato	20	30	20	20	5 0	30	30	50	50
4.0	5	(13%)	Maize+banana	R	Onion			30	30				20	20
5.0	4	(13%)	Maize+sorgha m	C	Kindrey bean								10 0	
6.0			Maize+cow pea	R	Dried fish								15 0	
Others	2	(5%)	Maize+sesame	C	Cassava									20 0
			Maize+finger	CC	Food oil	10 0	50	50	50		50	10 0	50	50
			Maize	C										
			Sweat potato	C										

Cotton	R	Coconut tree	100	60			50	40		50
Rice	CC	Tea		50						
Tomato	C	Tobacco		150	60	60				
		Soda						150		
monetary unit= Tanzania shilling by Hussein Hassan										

**Table 2:** Scale of Land Management Area -in the case of 38 persons in Nyameni

**Table 3:** Combination of Crops and Frequency in Sagara (CC: very common; C: common; R:rare)

**Table 4:** Daily Trend of Cash Utilization

Table 2 shows the distribution of the respondents according to farm size. Farm size ranges from one to eight acres. Sixty percent of the respondents have farm sizes ranging from two to three acres. Large-scale peasants managing 8 hectares or more make up only five percent of the respondents. The main food crops of this area are maize, sorghum, rice, banana and sweet potatoes, as indicated in Table 3. However, maize is the most popular crop and is regarded as the staple food crop. Before maize was promoted by the national government in 1972 under the National Maize Project, the staple food crop of the area was sorghum. Government wanted the Sagara people to plant maize only and adopt a mono-cropping system contrary to their mixed cropping system. The latter, however, has survived and is popular among many peasants as they wish to avert the risk of crop failures due to various factors (cf. Table 3).

Cash economy and everyday life

Although peasants stick to subsistence production, they strongly recognize the importance of cash. This is clearly shown by the types of commodities brought into the village and the lifestyles of the people. The practice of drinking tea with sugar (and sometimes with milk) is another. Most of the commodities flowing into the village come from the outside world and are basically consumer goods, which are not produced inside the village like radios, bicycles, clothes, medicine, batteries, lamps, and many other things. They also include canned food, dried fish, sugar and salt. While they use money to buy commodities mentioned above, peasants still use cash to purchase some of the foodstuff, which they need for their daily consumption, especially tomatoes and onions.

Table 4 shows the items for which cash is being utilized by one of the peasants living an ordinary life in Nyameni. The peasant buys salt, sugar, soap, oil, tomatoes, onions, dried fish, and cooking oil. He buys food little by little on a daily basis. Peasants often purchase tomatoes

and onions and other staple foods like cassava, as shown in Table. 4. Sometimes peasants buy soft drinks like soda (Coca-Cola) in order to have a glimpse of urban life within the village.

Under these circumstances, they try to get more money in their everyday life in order to maintain the above life style. Among the peasants, some get money by hunting and through keeping livestock. However, hunting activity is decreasing suddenly due to deforestation and shortage of animals. Livestock is limited to small animals like goats.

Among the richest peasants in villages of Sagara society, some of them get money through rental business of machines like maize milling machines, although the number of peasants who own such machines is very limited. Due to the fact that income -generating activities are very limited, most Sagara people are also dependent on wage labor. Such labor is confined to agricultural work although carrying luggage (porters), logging (cutting trees), scaring birds, building houses, weeding, breeding goats, building toilets, etc. may also yield a cash income. All these activities grouped together are commonly referred to as *kibarua*.<sup>8</sup> The analysis of these phenomena helps one visualize the key features of the peasant economy as a whole in Sagara society.

#### KIBARUA AND PEASANT ECONOMY IN SAGARA

This section discusses the current practices of *kibarua* labor among peasants and the relationship that exists between employer and worker in this system.

##### Utilization of *kibarua*

*Kibarua* (plural: *vibarua*) generally means casual and seasonal labor in Kiswahili.<sup>9</sup> The typical *kibarua* worker migrates from region to region or from area to area. Although there are laborers from other ethnic groups like the Gogo and Goni in Sagara society, most casual laborers are from among the Sagara themselves. *Kibarua* is the most convenient way for peasants to get cash in the village. More than half of the able-bodied members in the village are generally employed a few times a year. There are two types of employers: (a) the plantation estates and (b) the peasants themselves.

There are two plantations in Nyameni, one growing sugar cane owned by an Arab family and another growing coconut trees that is owned and managed by a Luguru family. In addition, both plantation owners have agricultural fields, which are normally planted with maize and rice. On the plantations there is usually a regular demand for *kibarua* work. If peasants want to work, they can easily find it. When they do, peasants work 2-3 days a week before returning to their own domestic agricultural work. Peasants who accept to work as *vibarua* receive an advance payment to allow them to meet subsistence expenses such as food. Because most food items are costly, the *kibarua* worker typically has little cash at hand.

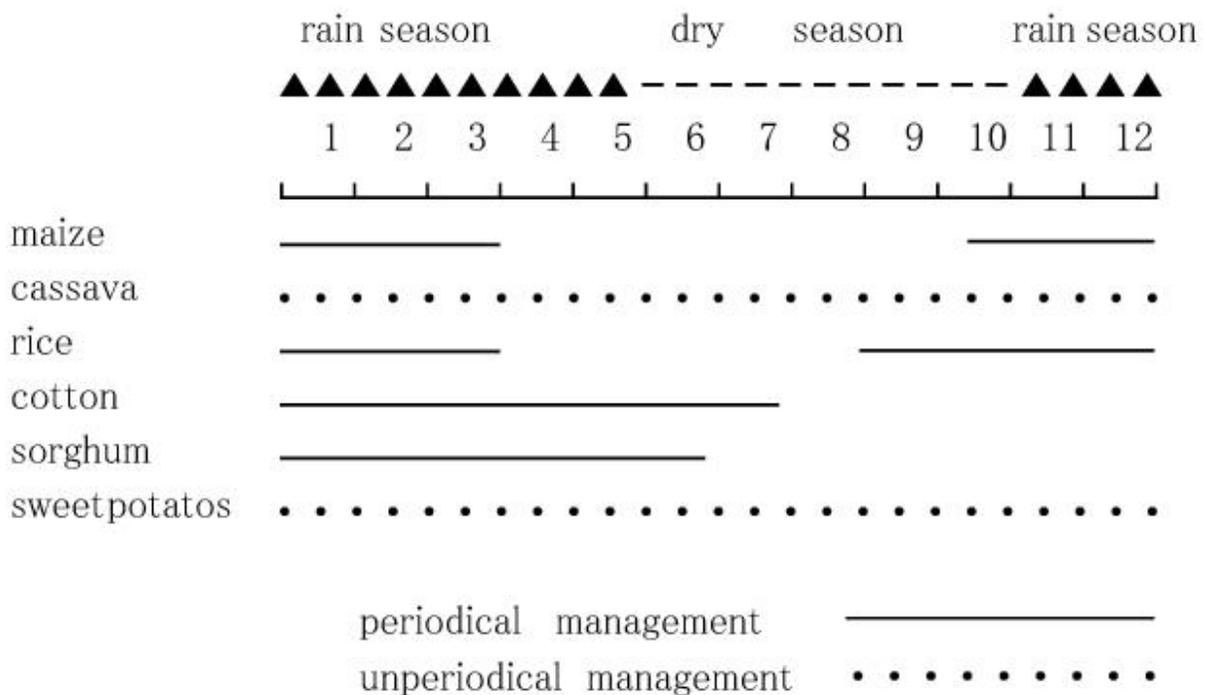
The other type of employer are the Sagara peasant themselves. Within the local community, there is a custom promoting the use of *vibarua* workers. Hiring a person takes place once a farmer has enough money. There are minor differences between the rich and the poor in terms of utilization of *kibarua*. Under normal circumstances, the villager who employs someone has a purpose of extending his or her farm size and to ease the burden of agricultural work. Thus, the utilization of the *kibarua* does not only concern or take place among the rich peasants,

but also the poor ones. In reality, even the rich peasant in the Sagara community has only little capital to employ a *kibarua*. Therefore, comparing the two venues of *kibarua* employment, the plantation surpasses overwhelmingly the rich peasant in terms of employment power, and peasants usually find themselves working on the plantations.

The *kibarua* phenomenon among the peasants

In order to understand the *kibarua* phenomenon among the peasants in Sagaraland, it is necessary to look at the seasonal fluctuation of wage laborers and the role of Sagara peasants as employers. The use of *kibarua* fluctuates in accordance with the agricultural season.

Fig. 2. Agricultural calender in Sagara society



As shown in Figure 2, peasants plant maize in December when the rainy season begins and harvest maize at the end of March. Generally speaking, the peasants manage their subsistence life by selling maize products. From September when the dry season begins, peasants spend much of their money on marriage ceremonies and other forms of private consumption. This situation leaves the peasants with little maize or money to allow them to purchase some maize in the market.

Interest in working as *kibarua* laborer also fluctuates according to needs within the household. For instance, in April and May peasants concentrate on domestic work and don not want to work as *vibarua*. Around December when money and food supply is short, their interest in doing so increases significantly. When peasants have money and can meet most of their needs they see no reason to work as *vibarua* and concentrate on domestic work. According to an

interview with the manager of the Arab plantation, the management understands the changing needs of the peasants and can take advantage of their needs by hiring them at a low remuneration. It is mainly interested in fulfilling its own production plan and hires a large number of peasants at reduced wage level at times when they are in dire need of cash. In comparison, employment provided by peasants is more flexible and can be extended according to the peasants' needs for work around December without reducing the wage like the plantation manager does. Peasants, however, have their own limitations when it comes to hiring a *kibarua* worker and they cannot do so as easily as the plantations can.

At this preliminary stage of my study, I am unable to conclude what the origin of seasonal *kibarua* relation among peasants might have been, but according to interviews with elderly peasants, it is related to traditional work practices in Sagara society before the introduction of a cash economy. According to this traditional custom, poor peasants have a right to work as *vibarua* (or look for wage labor) during times of difficulties while rich peasants have an obligation to give poor peasants work. This kind of moral economy plays a key role of maintaining the relationship between the *kibarua* worker and the employer as discussed in detail in the following section.

#### EMPLOYERS AND *KIBARUA* WORKERS AMONG PEASANTS

What about the concrete relationship between the villager employer and *kibarua* worker? In Nyameni village, the relations between employer and *kibarua* are not in terms of ownership of means of production like those found among landowners in agriculturally more advanced countries. As shown above, most of the peasants in the village have 2-4 acres. Therefore, there is no clear social stratification among peasants in the Sagara community. The utilization of *kibarua* is not something exclusive for privileged people as many peasants hope to do so whenever possible. A peasant who works as *kibarua* may employ some one else on those terms once he gets enough money from some of the source of income. There is no constancy in the relationship between the *kibarua* employer and worker. It is re-established afresh every year. Thus, even if the peasant performs *kibarua* work every year he initiates the relationship with the employer very selectively depending on the circumstances that exist in any given year.

It should be clearly understood that it is the *kibarua* who looks for work and not the employer who seeks wage laborers. It is not the role of the employer to look for a *kibarua*. This arrangement, as suggested above, is based on the belief that rich peasants cannot refuse employing someone as *kibarua* whenever such a need arises. Rich persons hold a special status in their community and they cannot afford to lose it by refusing *kibarua*.

Peasants recognize that *kibarua* work is a means to avoid a crisis or difficulty like hunger. It is not uncommon to find people in Nyameni suffering from hunger due to unfavorable weather and outbreak of pests or insects. Under such circumstances, peasants think of *kibarua* as the only alternative to get them out of that situation. According to interviews with the Nyameni peasants, 22 out of 25 persons responded that they depend on *kibarua* work during the time of food shortages. There is, therefore, a distinct sense of reciprocity among the peasants that helps them sustain their livelihoods even at times of crises. They have the same expectations of the

plantation management and they claim that they allow these enterprises in their midst only as long as they show generosity of employing them when they need money.

Because the plantation management operates on commercial principles, it cannot necessarily satisfy these expectations as well as the richer village farmers can do. Most villagers regard the latter to be more helpful because they do show an understanding of the customary principle of reciprocity to a greater extent than the plantation managers do. The village farmers who are best placed to hire *kibarua* labor often have another source of income as well. For instance, the village chairman and the village secretary are among the better off members of Nyameni village. So are those who do some handy work on the side, e.g. carpentry. Even though these people often have large families, in some cases more than one wife, they are ready to hire *vibarua* as a way of maintaining their status and respect in society. It is not strictly a business relationship in the formal sense of the word but rather a clientelistic relationship involving the pay for work rendered.

Persons who employ *vibarua* resemble the figures discussed by Sahlins in his discussion on "primitive exchange": persons who assist others reap great social and political benefits from their actions.<sup>10</sup> Nyameni is no exception. People getting elected to village government are typically local patrons who have carefully attended to local customary principles of reciprocity. These people are expected to spend more money than others at formal occasions. Poor families in the village regard rich persons as people who will take care of them by providing *kibarua* employment at times of need. The *kibarua* phenomenon, then, is not generating capitalism but helps distribute cash within villages of Sagara society. In this respect, it cannot be equated with wage labor in more developed countries and other Third World countries.

## CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

According to Kasfir, the presence of *kibarua* labor would be evidence of capitalist penetration and a social differentiation between rich and poor peasants.<sup>11</sup> Such a conclusion, however, is too simplistic and misleading, because *kibarua* is initiated not by employers but those in search of temporary work. This is the kind of moral economy that can also be found in many parts of southeast Asia where a poor person is regarded as having the right to be employed, however briefly, to earn some cash. Because the social stratification among the rural population in Sagara society is less marked than it is in southeast Asia, the *kibarua* worker can often exercise more pressure on the employer to offer him temporary work.

While it is possible to find landless peasants in Asia it is hard to find a person without land in Africa. The moral economy, therefore, tends to survive in African societies even where capitalism has made definite inroads, e.g. Kenya. A study by Hanzawa, for example, shows the existence of African peasants who, though having surplus domestic labor, nevertheless hire jobless fellows as wage laborers with the intention of giving them employment.<sup>12</sup>

Another such example is Sugiyama's vivid description of the Bemba of northern Zambia.<sup>13</sup> According to her, commercial cultivation of hybrid maize using chemical fertilizers was first introduced among the Bemba in the early 1980s. Since then, this highly commercial and intensive agriculture has been rapidly spreading throughout Bembaland, even in the most remote areas. At first glance, this rapid spread of modern commercial agriculture appears to

demonstrate that Bemba peasants have been totally transformed into "rational farmers." However, the facts tell quite a different story. According to Sugiyama, Bemba peasants have preserved their traditional moral principle of "the haves must give to the have-nots." She describes an interesting incident that occurred in a Bemba village. When a distributor of chemical fertilizers refused to extend credit to a villager who had not cleared off his previous debts to the distributor, another wealthy villager paid off all of the poor one's debts so that the latter could buy fertilizers for the coming season on credit from the distributor. As this episode clearly shows, a phenomenon that can be called "the sharing of cash" is widely observed in Bemba villages. Even somebody's personal debt problem is treated as a common "hardship," and thus wealthy members are strongly required to shoulder debts of the poor according to the traditional spirit of mutual help.

What we are witnessing in African societies is not the decline of the economy of affection and its replacement by a capitalist economy. Rather what takes place is a modernization of the economy of affection according to which cash is distributed to the poor through various structural relationships.

#### Notes:

1. Debate on the African Peasantry developed in the journal of "Development and Change" concerning the concept of "Uncaptured Peasant" or "Economy of Affection proposed by Goran Hyden. In the above debate, Kasfir pointed out the existence of the wage labor phenomenon as the index of capitalization linking with the World System into the present society in Africa. According to the criticisms offered by Kasfir, Hyden's theme hasn't developed through the analysis of the peasant economy at the micro level. See Kasfir, Nelson's article, 'Are African Peasants Self-Sufficient?' *Development and Change*, vol.17, no. 2. (1986). On the other hand, Hanzawa, shows the possibility of the existence of African peasants who, though having surplus domestic labor, nevertheless hire jobless fellows as wage laborers with the intention of giving them employment ,which produces economy of affection in Kenya, the most capitalized country among Africa. See Hanzawa's article, 'The Development and Characteristics of Commercial Agriculture in Kenya' in Kodamaya Shiro (eds), *Commercialization of Agriculture in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Chiba. The Institute of Developing Economics. (in Japanese) (1993) .
2. Kasfir 1986, pp.335-357.
3. Hyden, Goran. *Beyond Ujamaa in Tanzania: Underdevelopment and An Uncaptured Peasantry*. London: Heinemann Educational Books (1980).
4. Tama, Shinnosuke. *Economics of Farm Household and Farmland*, Tokyo:
5. Nobunkyo (in Japanese)( 1994).
6. Yoshida, Masao. "The Debate on Ujamaa Policy in Tanzania". *The developing economies* ,vol.23,no9. (in Japanese)( 1984).
7. Geertz, Clifford. *Agricultural Involution*. Berkeley CA: University of California Press(1963). Scott, James C. *The Moral Economy of the Peasant*. New Haven CT: Yale University Press (1976).

8. The data for this paper were obtained by using the following methods: (1) A questionnaire (structured or semi-structured) covering aspects pertaining to the dynamics of the peasant economy of the Nyameni village of Sagaraland. (2) Informal interviews and discussion with key informants. (3) Observation. Fieldwork was carried out between August and September 1994. My intensive research in Nyameni was also carried out from the end of August to September in 1994.
9. Kibarua means wage labor and a wage laborer.
10. Sagara people has an original language, Kisagara ,but in the present day most of Sagara speak Kiswahili in the daily life.
11. Sahlins describe the image of the rich man in the primitive society as generous people in the discussion on primitive exchange.
12. Kasfir, 1986, p. 345.
13. Hanzawa, 1993, pp.193-195.
14. Sugiyama, Yuko. "Agricultural Policy in Bemba Rural Areas" in T. Takane (ed.). *Political-Economic Dynamics and Society*. Chiba. The Institute of Developing Economics. (in Japanese). 2001.

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