

Abstract

Coffee production in Kenya 1940 to 1963 – did the settler farms gain from increased competition?

From the 1940s Kenya witnessed an increase in African smallholder coffee growers due to, among others, a shift in colonial policies. The consensus view is that the smallholders with their use of family labour, knowledge of the local ecology, and ability to cope with shocks managed to outcompete the settler farms (see e.g. Deininger & Binswanger, 1995; Hyde, 2009; Andersson & Thorup 1985; and Frankema, Green & Hillbom 2014). Yet, large-scale farming is often seen as more advantageous as it allows for mechanization and the utilization of economies of scale (see e.g. Collier, 2009).

This paper, which forms part of my PhD project, revisits the discussion of small versus large-scale farming by looking at the impact on large-scale settler farms from the increase in African smallholder coffee production. While the consensus view states that settler farms were outcompeted this paper argues that it was the medium-sized settler farms that were outcompeted while large-scale settler farms were able to gain from the increased competition by utilizing economies of scale and increasing mechanization.

Primary data from historical records on agriculture is used to develop indicators that measure the performance of large-scale settler farms in the time period.

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