



POSITION PAPER

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FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION IN KENYA: The Role of Population



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Overview

Food security is achieved when all people at all times have regular and permanent physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life (Kenya Food Security Act, 2017).

This definition was put forth by Food and Agricultural Organization and is anchored on four conditions:

- (i) Adequacy of food supply
- (ii) Stability of food supply without fluctuations or shortages from season to season or from year to year,
- (iii) Accessibility and affordability of food and lastly quality and safety of food¹.

Food and nutrition security remain a major global issue and is at the top of the international development priorities as depicted through various global ratifications. Among the six global targets approved by World Health Assembly (WHA) in the 2012 and which also form part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) monitoring framework speak directly to matters

nutrition i) Reducing stunting; ii) Reducing wasting; and iii) Rating the rise of overweight among children under five years of age¹.

Furthermore, the United Nations member states in 2015 adopted the Global Goals (SDGs) to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all.

The 2030 Development agenda calls on all countries to end hunger, achieve food security, improve nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture. To achieve these objectives requires several issues to be addressed.

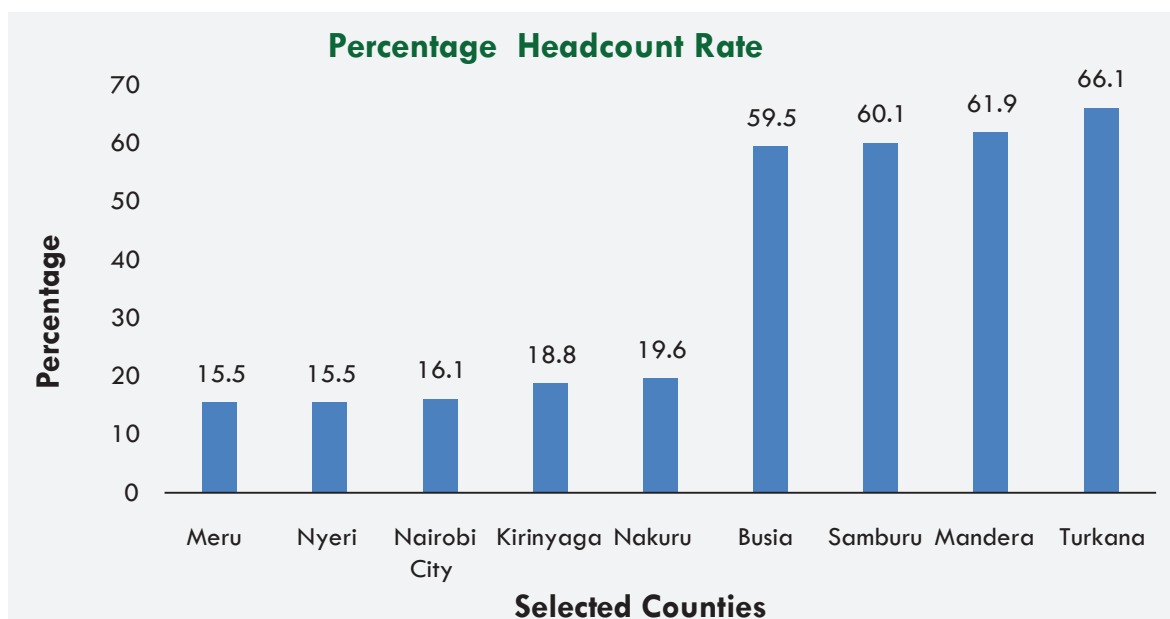
Globally, the number of undernourished people is

unacceptably high and stands at about 821 million². This situation is likely to deteriorate given the projected global population growth to 9.7 billion by 2050, existing and emerging food production constraints, changing consumption patterns and the anticipated impact of climate change.

In Kenya food security and nutrition is one of the basic human rights of every individual as stipulated in 2017 Food Security Act and the Constitution and therefore imposes obligations on the state to respect, protect and fulfil food and nutrition security.

Kenya is Food Insecure

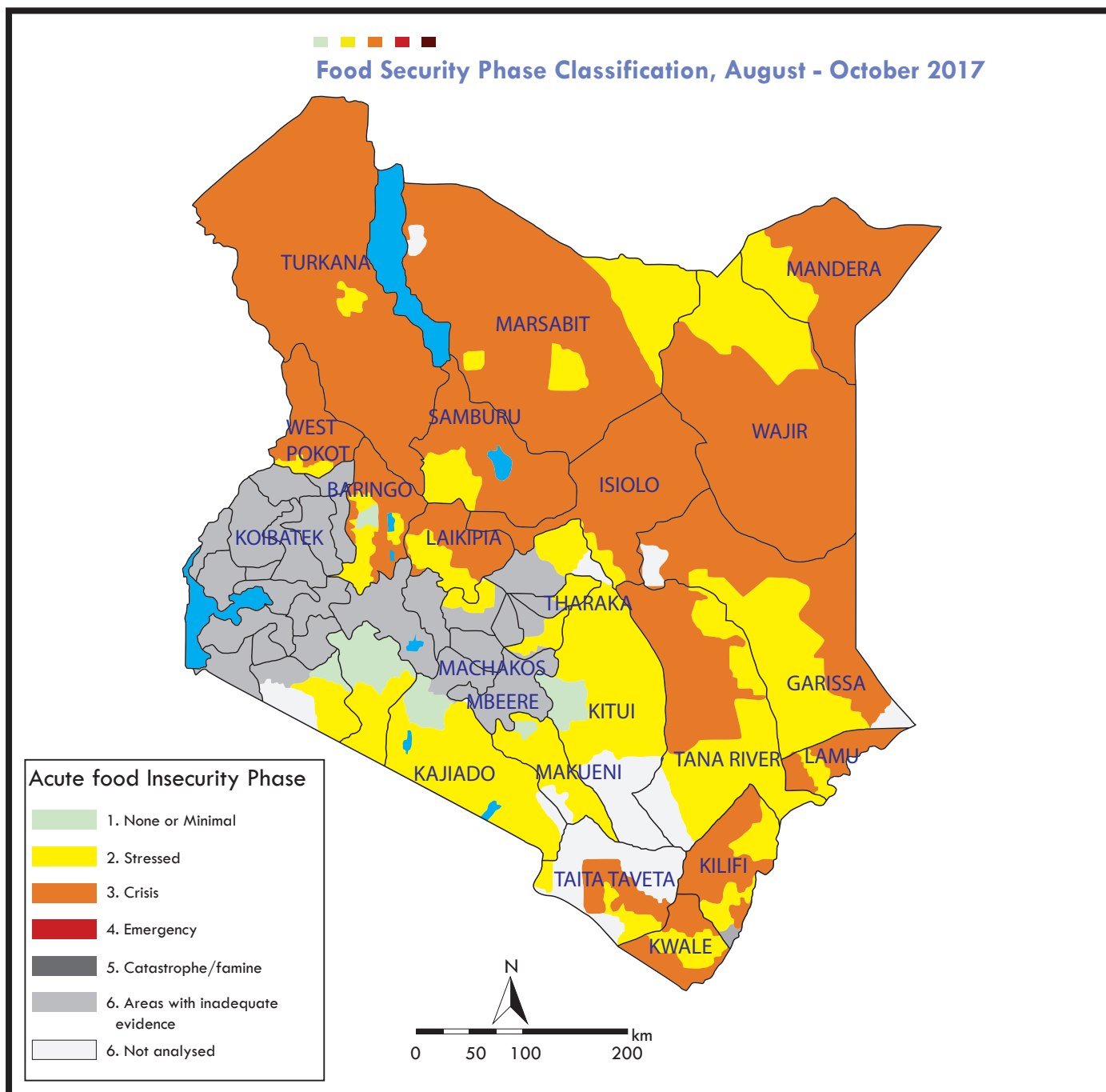
Persistent and widespread hunger and malnutrition remain a huge challenge in some parts of the country. The 2015/16 Kenya household and Budget Survey showed that a significant percentage of Kenyans are food insecure. The report indicated the national food poverty headcount rate for individuals at 32 per cent, implying that about 14.5 million individuals are below the food poverty line. Food poverty incidence is highest in rural areas representing 35.8 percent of the population living below the food poverty line (see figure 1). The food poverty headcount rate ranges from 66.1 percent in Turkana and lowest in Meru and Nyeri counties at 15.5 per cent.



Source: 2015/16 Kenya household and Budget Survey Report Basic Report on Well-Being

Over the last five years, agricultural sector growth has been on a downward trend from 5.4 percent in 2013 to 1.6 percent in 2017. Notably, the production of maize, Kenya's staple food has decreased from 40.7 million

bags in 2013 to an estimated 35.8 million bags in 2017; significantly lower than the national consumption of 45 million bags per annum³. This translated into adverse food insecurity especially in ASAL areas as shown below.



Source: Kenya IPC Technical Working group, July 2017

Food security is one of the government's priorities for the Third Medium Term Plan. The government aims to achieve 27 percent reduction in malnutrition among children under 5 years of age; 50 percent reduction in the number of food insecure Kenyans; and 47 percent reduction in the cost of food as a percentage of income.⁴ To achieve food security and proper nutrition for all Kenyans, the government targets to increase production of maize from 40 million 90 kg bags

annually to 67 million bags by 2022; rice from around 125,000 metric tonnes currently to 400,000 metric tonnes by 2022 and potatoes from the current 1.6 million tonnes to about 2.5 MT by 2022.

To strengthen food security the government needs to address challenges to eliminating hunger. On the supply side, the country has been experiencing deficit in all food categories due to low production and

post-harvest losses occasioned by poor storage⁵. On the demand side, continued population growth and urbanization are some of the key challenges especially in developing countries⁶.

Population and Food Security

Population growth and age composition have an impact on food security. Kenya's population has rapidly increased, rising from 5.4 million in 1948 to a current estimate of 45.8 million, with an inter-censal population growth rate of 2.9 per cent and is expected to reach 52 million in 2020 and about 65 million by 2030 (State of Kenya Population Report, 2017). The rapid population growth has been as a result of high fertility in previous decades and substantial decline in mortality, particularly infant and child mortality due to improvement in health and increased life expectancy. Historically, this population has been dominated by young people (24 years and below) representing about 64 percent and an increasing elderly population of about five percent of the total population. Approximately 20.5 percent of the young people are youth aged 15-24 years⁷ (KNBS, 2010).

Population pressure, increasing dependency ratio undermines food supply and access. The 2015/16 Kenya household and Budget Survey shows that Kenya has a dependency ratio of 84 per 100 working persons. This high age-dependency ratio diminishes productivity in agriculture because a lower share of the population is in the workforce.

Studies have also shown age as a key determinant of food demand with the elderly population consuming more of traditional foods compared to younger people that prefer processed foods⁸. Consumption among the elderly also changes depending on special needs.

Malnutrition is still a challenge and largely manifests among children 0-9 year olds with stunted growth being common among children 18-23 months. Although, the country has made tremendous strides in reducing the prevalence of stunting growth, from 35 percent in 2009

to 29.9 percent in 2016, stunting growth remain prevalent with highest proportion (32.4%) of children in the rural areas reported as moderately stunted compared to those in urban areas (24.5 %) ⁹.

Owing to the high rate of population growth, the country's population has more than tripled in the past 35 years resulting to significant strain on available resources, leaving young people and women increasingly vulnerable to poverty and malnutrition⁹. Growing population has caused increased land fragmentation and resettlement in agricultural rich areas with direct effect on food production through ineffective and destructive farming practices. Current encroachment and destruction of forested areas can be attributed to rapid population growth and has concomitant effects on rainfall and food production.

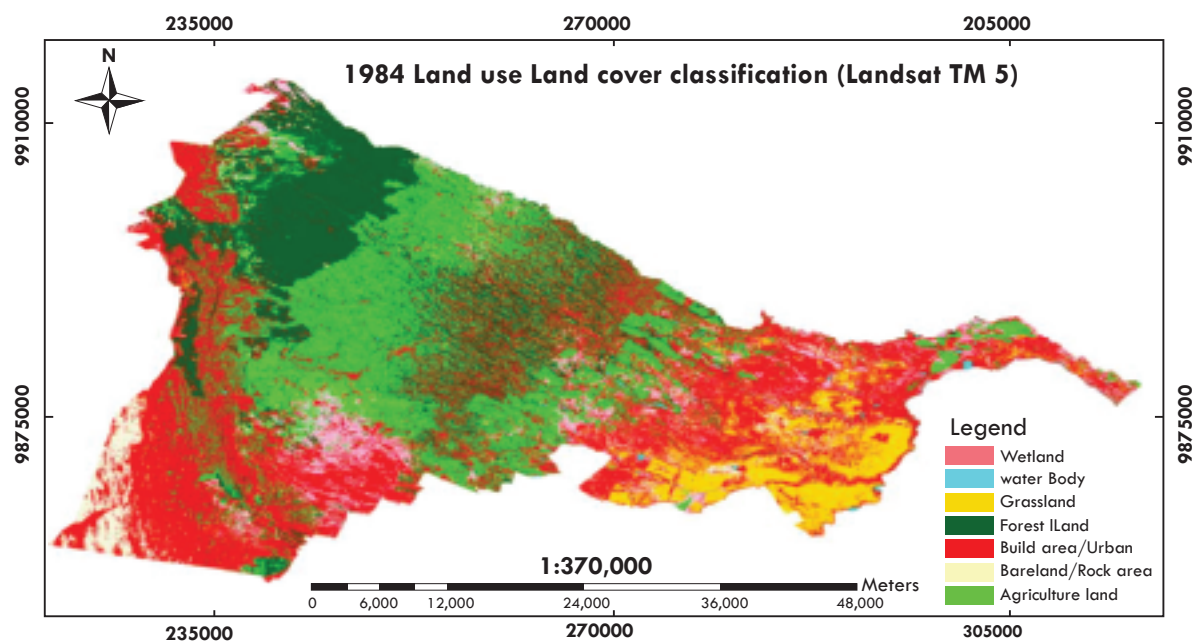
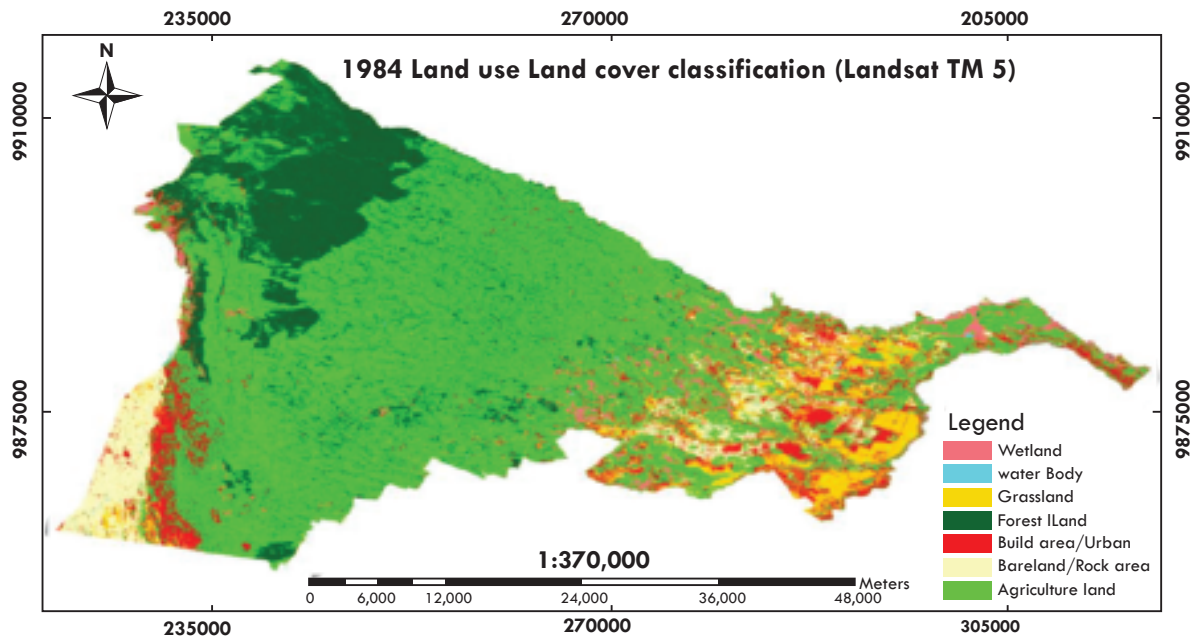
Urbanization Food Security and Nutrition

The world population is becoming increasingly urbanized with 55 percent of the population living in urban areas in 2018¹⁰. It is projected that by 2030, urban population in developing countries will double while areas covered by cities will triple. In Kenya, urban population is growing fast. The number of Kenyans living in urban areas increased from about 5 million people in 1999 to 12 million in 2009 representing 31.1 percent of total population¹¹. This has profound implications on food security and nutrition.

Food Supply:

As the urban population increases there has been a reduction in agricultural land especially in peri-urban areas surrounding major cities such as Kiambu town with consequent reduction in food supply due to competition between areas used for agricultural production and areas used for expanding urban settlements with consequent reduction in food supply (see figure 3).

Land Cover Change map of Kiambu County, Comparison of 1984 and 2013



Food production may also be affected by the increased competition for water resources between the agricultural sector and the growing population in urban centers combined with adverse effects of climate change.

Urbanization also impacts on food supply due to reduction in agricultural labour as more people moves to cities. The youthful population in Kenya presents an opportunity to increase food production. However, the country continues to experience migration of young people from the rural areas where agricultural production takes place to urban areas leaving behind

the elderly and children. Majority (62 percent) of the urban population in Kenya consists of economically active population (15-64 yrs)¹². This has a threat to the labor intensive agricultural sector and consequent reduction in food production as older farmers who are mainly women are likely to shift to less-labour intensive subsistence farming.

Migration can be attributed to several factors among them reducing landholdings due to land fragmentation, search for wage employment and education opportunities¹³. Small landholdings impact negatively on the capacity to support household food demands

and consequently increase dependency on wage employment. The wage labor currently accounts for more than 50 per cent of the rural households' income with adolescent and young adult household members compelled to migrate to urban areas in search of wage employment to supplement family livelihood¹³.

In addition to reduced household food production, households are likely to experience food insecurity due to rising staple food prices against dependence on wage employment. However, it can also be argued that wage employment may actually improve food security especially in areas where household food yields are largely affected by seasonal performance associated with changing weather patterns¹². Proportion of population not growing food characterized by overdependence on purchased food will continue to grow with urbanization. Although this may mean improved prices for agricultural produce and increased income for agriculture depended households, it could also undermine food security efforts through increase food prices and subsequent reduction in purchasing power of those living in urban areas¹³.

Changes in Dietary patterns

Urbanisation has an impact on food consumption patterns as migrants adopt new behavior after settling in a new environment. Urbanization coupled with higher urban incomes tends to increase demand for high-value foods, as part of a broad dietary transition². This may prompt food producers to reorient production to more expensive foodstuffs with negative consequences for food security of poorer population. Kenya is a middle income country and is therefore expected to experience increasing demands for certain food types as it gears towards middle income status. The growth of middle income population is further expected to drive an increase in energy demand with consequent rise in food prices. The rising energy prices may also translate into increased cost of agricultural inputs such as fertilizers, pesticides and fuel thus affecting food production.

Change in consumption patterns has given rise to concerns over the shift towards less healthy diets and the increasing prevalence of micronutrient deficiency and overweight. Kenya Step Wise Survey 2015

indicates that rise in diabetes is associated with demographic and social changes such as urbanization and adoption of unhealthy lifestyles such as consumption of unhealthy diets. The prevalence of diabetes in adults is estimated to be 4.56% amounting to almost 750,000 persons and 20,000 annual deaths. There is a disparity in distribution with an estimate of approximately 10.7 percent among urban and 2.7 percent among rural dwellers.

Call to Action

In order to tackle food security problem, population factors that affect food supply and demand such as rapid population growth, population structure, urbanization, rural-urban migration patterns must be taken into account during planning process. Significant policy reforms are necessary to ensure population factors are incorporated from the outset.

Population structure should be considered in agricultural productivity as different segments of population have varied nutrition requirements and preferences.

Population trends will continue to affect the demand and supply for food in the future. As such demographic projections need to be incorporated into governments' development plans to improve agricultural production and achieve greater food security.

The governments must deliberately pursue planned urbanization particularly limiting growth of urban centres in agriculturally potential areas.

By slowing population growth, food security challenges will become more manageable to address. The national government therefore needs to support the family planning programme through increased allocation of resources as an integral part of the Big 4 development Agenda. County Governments on the other hand should have a budget line for family planning to support the family planning programme by ensuring availability of FP services and commodities. Increasing access to voluntary family planning will enable couples to plan and space childbearing, enhancing their ability to provide enough food for their families.

NCPD is a semi-autonomous government agency that formulates and Promotes population policy and coordinates related activities for sustainable development in Kenya.

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