



HEALTHY EATING IN KENYA



Introduction

In Kenya, poverty, food insecurity, malnutrition, and income inequality remain prevalent, especially in the arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs). Food insecurity and higher rates of severe malnutrition have worsened vulnerabilities and resulted in chronic emergency requirements in the ASALs due to their drought-prone nature¹. This poster focuses on the increasing food insecurity rates, the health complications that can arise and the key causes of food insecurity in Kenya. The poster will also look at the country's policies relevant to food insecurity and how the UK has contributed to address the issue in Kenya.

Findings 1:

Food insecurity rates in Kenya

Between July and October 2021, an estimated 2.1 million individuals in Kenya were suffering from severe food insecurity. In comparison to the same period in 2020, the number of individuals classed in Crisis and Emergency increased by 34%. Food insecurity has deteriorated and become more significant as a result of two consecutive years of inadequate seasonal rainfall².

The demographic group most vulnerable to starvation is children. This is because their developing bodies are more susceptible to the further issues that hunger causes, for instance, stunted growth affects around 29% of children in rural regions and 20% of children in cities, indicating severe vitamin and mineral deficiencies³. Vitamin and mineral deficiencies are a major public health concern in Kenya due to increasing food insecurity. Moreover, 1.5 million individuals living with HIV have their nutrition status undermined by their condition⁴.

Conclusion and Recommendations:

Due to the large number of individuals who rely on agriculture as their primary source of income as well as the need to produce more food at a lower cost, it is vital to support the farming industry.

There are several actions that the government must take such as: To protect farmers, the government should compensate them for losses, such as those caused by locust infestations or crop failures. The government should also support efforts to modernise farming practices and improve farmer links to markets and inputs, like seeds and fertilizers³.

Moreover, farmers require greater access to finance, such as bank loans. With this, farmers will be able to purchase the equipment, more farm labour and inputs needed for maximum food production.

When looking forward, there also needs to be an active effort to make farming and agriculture more attractive to young people³.

Findings 2:

Causes of food insecurity in Kenya

Many individuals still struggle to acquire adequate nutritious food, particularly in the arid and semi-arid regions, which make up 80 percent of the country's land area. The key factors of food insecurity include rapid population growth of 2.9 percent per year, climate change, stagnant agricultural productivity, and inadequate food systems.

Families that are food insecure are more likely to reside in rural regions, are impoverished, and rely on daily agricultural labour for income. Women-headed households are also more likely to be food insecure than households led by men⁴.

Agriculture remains the key economic driver, yet it is extremely susceptible to climate change. Unpredictable rainfall and recurrent droughts wreak havoc on crops, which are rain-fed in 95 percent of cases, and cause soil erosion. Inefficient food systems, the networks required to produce, process, and deliver food to consumers result in high costs and limited market supply, further restricting food availability and access⁴.

Policies to tackle food insecurity in Kenya:

Kenya has been in the forefront of tackling food insecurity, yet it is still far from being food secure. Several essential policies have been established over time to help enhance the agricultural sector in order to address food insecurity. Some of the important measures implemented to help tackle food insecurity are the Economic Recovery Strategy (ERS), Agriculture Sector Development Strategy (ASDS), Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), and Vision 2030. Despite the efforts of the government and the private sector, Kenya still faces multiple challenges in the agricultural sector, including land pressure due to growing population and a lack of agricultural research⁵.

The UK through the Department for International Development (DFID) is supporting a variety of different transformative programmes to preserve the country's agricultural industry and small farmers⁶, including:

- New support to the Global Alliance for Livestock Veterinary Medicines (GALVmed), helping to develop seven new vaccines for major neglected tropical diseases and widening their availability across Africa to benefit eight million smallholder farmers.
- Using investors to help small agricultural companies in Africa, including Kenya, attract long-term commercial finance to become profitable operations, allowing them to create jobs, support economic transformation and help countries move out of poverty.
- New research, led by UK-African partnerships across business and science, to develop new technology and innovations that will help to avoid food shortages and make food more nutritious, affordable, and resistant to climate change⁶.

References:

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