

Food Insecurity in Kenya

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Abstract

Food insecurity remains a critical challenge in Kenya, undermining the fundamental human right to food and hindering national development. This review synthesizes evidence from peer-reviewed literature and official reports to analyze the drivers, impacts, and potential solutions to this crisis. Despite the global definition of food security established at the 1996 World Food Summit, Kenya continues to struggle with ensuring that all its citizens have consistent access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food. The findings indicate that food insecurity is a multifaceted problem driven primarily by climate variability, which causes frequent droughts and floods that disrupt agricultural production. These environmental shocks are compounded by socio-economic factors such as poverty, rapid urbanization, and political instability. The consequences are severe, including high rates of acute food insecurity, malnutrition, and increased vulnerability among populations in arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs). This paper concludes that addressing food insecurity in Kenya requires an integrated approach that combines climate-resilient agricultural strategies with robust policy interventions aimed at strengthening governance, improving market access, and building household resilience to shocks.

Keywords: challenge, food, insecurity, high rates, policy interventions

1. Introduction

Food is a fundamental human need, essential not only for survival but also for maintaining health and dignity (Wambua et al., 2014). The concept of food security, as defined at the 1996 World Food Summit, means that "all people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food" (FAO, 1996; Ayala & Meier, 2017). Achieving this goal is also central to Sustainable Development Goal 2 (SDG 2) (Mollier et al., 2017). However, in Kenya, this objective remains elusive. A significant portion of the population lacks reliable access to adequate food, a situation acutely felt in the Horn of Africa region where over 70 million people are highly vulnerable (Bedasa & Bedemo, 2023). In Kenya, approximately 38.6% live below the poverty line, and chronic malnutrition stunts the growth of 29% of rural children (World Bank, 2021). The drivers of this crisis are complex and interconnected, shaped by climate change, poverty, weak policy frameworks, and socio-cultural factors. This review therefore aims to identify the key factors contributing to food insecurity, explore mitigation strategies, and recommend suitable policy interventions to address this pressing issue in Kenya.

2. Methods and Materials

This study employed a comprehensive and in – depth literature review to examine food insecurity in Kenya. The search was conducted using online academic databases to identify relevant peer-reviewed articles, official reports, and policy documents. The search strategy utilized specific keywords and

phrases such as “Food insecurity in Kenya,” “Climate change and food security in Kenya,” and “Agricultural policy interventions in Kenya.” A standardized data extraction form was used to capture key information from each source, including objectives, methodology, and primary findings. In – depth analysis was then applied to identify recurring patterns and categorize the findings into coherent segments related to the causes and solutions of food insecurity in Kenya.

3. Findings and Results

The analysis revealed that climate variability is a primary driver of food insecurity in Kenya. The country is highly vulnerable to natural disasters, with increasing temperatures and unpredictable rainfall patterns leading to frequent droughts and floods (Opere et al., 2019; Nyika, 2020). These events directly undermine agricultural productivity, particularly in the vast Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASALs), causing crop failure, livestock deaths, and heightened water scarcity (Armara, 2017). This environmental stress is compounded by socio-economic and political factors. Rapid urbanization encroaches on agricultural land and limits urban poor's access to affordable food (Kimani & Ngugi, 2018). Furthermore, political instability and poor governance, characterized by weak policy implementation and corruption, exacerbate the crisis by creating inefficiencies in food production and distribution systems (Odhiambo, 2018; Mwangi et al., 2019). The result is a persistent state of food crisis for millions, with studies from various counties confirming that households face severe food shortages, rely on coping strategies like selling assets, and experience high levels of malnutrition, especially among children and the elderly.

4. Discussion

The findings underscore that food insecurity in Kenya is not the result of a single cause but a synergistic interplay of environmental and anthropogenic factors. Climate change acts as a threat multiplier, intensifying pre-existing vulnerabilities rooted in poverty and institutional weaknesses. The frequent climate shocks destroy livelihoods and assets, pushing households into a cycle of poverty from which recovery is difficult (Nyika, 2020; Armara, 2017). The discussion must also critically assess the role of governance; the inadequacy of public policies and their poor execution significantly hinders the effectiveness of interventions aimed at building resilient food systems (Odhiambo, 2018; Mwangi et al., 2019). While strategies like Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA) are promoted, their adoption is often limited by the very barriers this review identifies: lack of access to credit, limited extension services, and deep-seated socio-cultural norms. Therefore, technical solutions alone are insufficient. A transformative approach is needed—one that integrates climate adaptation with structural reforms to improve governance, empower local communities, and address the underlying socio-economic inequalities that perpetuate food insecurity.

5. Future Research Directions and Recommendations

Future research should prioritize longitudinal studies to track the long-term impacts and sustainability of food security interventions like Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA) in different agro-ecological zones of Kenya. There is a need to quantitatively assess the socio-economic barriers that limit the adoption of these innovations, particularly among women and marginalized smallholder farmers. Investigation into the role of digital technology in improving market access, early warning systems, and financial inclusion for rural households represents another critical avenue. Furthermore, research should explore the

potential of underutilized food sources, such as indigenous crops and edible insects, in enhancing dietary diversity and resilience. Studies must also critically evaluate the implementation and impact of existing national policies, such as the National Climate Change Action Plan (Government of Kenya, 2018), to provide evidence for more effective, context-specific governance frameworks. Ultimately, future work should adopt a transdisciplinary approach, co-creating knowledge with communities to ensure that research findings are directly applicable and actionable on the ground.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, food insecurity in Kenya is a pervasive and complex crisis driven by a confluence of climate variability, socio-economic pressures, and governance challenges. The evidence clearly shows that erratic weather patterns, including droughts and floods, severely disrupt agricultural production and livelihoods, particularly in the vulnerable ASAL regions. These environmental shocks are exacerbated by poverty, rapid urbanization, and political instability, which together create a fragile food system. Addressing this multifaceted issue requires a holistic and integrated strategy. Efforts must simultaneously promote the adoption of climate-resilient agricultural practices, strengthen governance and policy implementation, and invest in rural infrastructure and social protection systems. Empowering local communities and ensuring their participation in decision-making is crucial for developing sustainable and culturally appropriate solutions. Without coordinated and decisive action from government, development partners, and the private sector, the goal of food security for all Kenyans, as envisioned in both national and global agendas, will remain out of reach.

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