



Population and Food Security in Kenya

Almost one in seven people around the world are chronically hungry, lacking enough food to be healthy and lead active lives¹.

In Kenya, 51 percent of the people lack enough food². This is largely attributed not only to agricultural policies, the prices of certain food commodities—such as meat and grain, and economic development but also to demographic trends which have played a leading role, negatively affecting food security worldwide³.

Evidence shows that the increasing population often drives up demand for food, which typically results in increased and intense use of arable land and water⁴. This situation is extremely dire in areas with inadequate use of modern technology and integrated programmes that addresses both the community needs for food and reproductive health⁵. Global population is projected to increase to 9.3 billion in 2050 whereas demand for food is projected to double by 2030. Twenty percent of that increase is attributed to population growth⁶.

Interventions to enhance food security must therefore involve addressing issues of nutrition and health needs of families in the developing world. Increasing access to family planning education and availing family planning services helps slow down population growth, leading to strong healthy families that can competitively practice farming business to improve productivity, household incomes and food and nutritional security at the household level.

Background Information

This policy brief analyses the linkage between population and food security in Kenya with a view to creating awareness among the policy makers and programme implementers, on the need to address the population issues alongside food security, in order to improve the welfare of the Kenya citizens.

According to Food and Agriculture Organization, food security is defined as “When all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life⁷. In Kenya, 51 percent of people lack sufficient food, the majority of them being the poor⁸.

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Food and Agriculture Organization

Population growth has been attributed to the food crisis because of its very direct impact on increased demand for food.

Kenya has witnessed a rapid population growth from 10.9 million in 1969 to 38,473,893 in 2010 and is projected to increase to 63 million by the year 2030. In 2010, the proportion of children aged 0-14 years constituted 43 percent. While the youth aged 15-34 years, working age population aged 15-64 years and the elderly aged 65 and above years—constituted 35, 53 and almost 4 percent respectively. On the other hand, the dependency ratio was estimated at 87.3 percent, with the rural areas having a dependency ratio of 1.008 compared to urban areas with a dependency ratio of 63 percent. This high dependency ratio has increased pressure on resources generated by the households leading to reduced savings and resources for investments—hence structural poverty. It is estimated that over 45 percent of the total population in Kenya live below the poverty line whereby over 50.5 percent live in rural areas compared to 33.5 percent in urban areas⁹.

Links Between Population and Food Security

Population growth not only affects the demand for food but also has a negative impact on food supply and access.

Population growth is associated with increasing population densities which leads to land fragmentation and subsequently, settlement of people in fragile environments—including wetlands, arid and semi-arid areas¹⁰.

In many areas in Kenya, land fragmentation contributes to inefficient and destructive farming practices and increased cultivation of marginal land, which often reduces food production and leads to migration to urban centres in search of white collar jobs.

Internal migration especially rural-urban migration has enabled a large share of rural income to be earned by rural residents who migrate temporarily to places where they can find jobs. However, the increased dependence on wage employment may affect food security by reducing the number of people practicing farming in various ways. Since agriculture contributes 24 percent, reduced output will lead to poor economic performance, rising prices of staple food, reduced employment opportunities, reduced application of technology and the inability of employers to secure loans.

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Finally, wage employment may actually improve food security in arid and semi-arid areas, when unreliable rainfall and household farming yields are poor, due to frequent droughts. For the households living in arid and semi-arid areas, wage employment and agribusiness practices more often serve as a mitigation and adaptation measure against the impact of climate change including crop failures.

Increasing urbanization as a result of the increasing rural-urban migration is also often associated with decrease in food supply due to loss of agricultural land and dietary diversification. The expansion of urban space tends to affect farm lands because many cities and towns are located in rich agricultural lands, for example Nairobi city has expanded rapidly reducing the areas under farming to Kiambu, Muranga, Machakos and Kajiado counties. Cities and their growing populations also increasingly compete with the agricultural sector for scarce water resources, resulting in less water for irrigation.

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Policy and Programme Implications

Kenya has over the years put in place and implemented various interventions to address the problems of food insecurity. These interventions aim at increasing food production through the introduction and provision of drought resistant crops and fertilizer at subsidized prices among other interventions to farmers. However, it is evident that increased food production alone is not likely to solve the world's food security problem¹¹.

Studies show that it is only a slower population growth which could significantly lower malnutrition together with increased agricultural production, economic growth and investment in health and education¹². This is so considering the fact that population will continue to grow in Kenya and this will affect the demand and supply

of food in the coming years. However, despite the increasing understanding that population management is crucial in addressing food security problems in the country, population issues are adequately incorporated into agricultural policies and programmes.

Policy Recommendations

1. There is a need for the Ministry of Devolution and Planning to ensure that population issues are incorporated into plans to improve agricultural production and achieve food security in Kenya's Vision 2030—Medium Term Plans interventions, such as investment in rural infrastructure—comprising roads, irrigation and storage facilities.
2. There is a need for the Ministry of Devolution and Planning to legitimize and institutionalize integrated development approaches, specifically Population, Health and Environment (PHE) integrated approach in Kenya's Vision 2030 Medium Term Plans. These approaches are capable of simultaneously addressing both population factors and food security. This leads to improvement in food security by increasing access to contraception while providing opportunities for couples, especially women, to become community leaders and stewards of natural resources which the households depends on for food.
3. There is a need for the Ministry of Lands and Urban Development to enforce the legislation banning the subdivision of agricultural land into uneconomical units (less than 2 hectares) especially in the low potential agricultural areas where agricultural intensification may not be possible.

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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Programme recommendations

1. There is a need for the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock and Fisheries (MOAL&F) to upscale social protection programmes with regard to food insecurity such as provision of inputs (seeds and Fertilizers), cheap agricultural credit and grant food aid and supplies in areas hardest hit by drought.
2. The MOAL&F also need to put in place programmes to increase food production and security at the household level like Urban Agriculture, Youth in Agriculture, Women in Agriculture, Aquaculture (Fish farming), Apiculture, Livestock off take just before drought sets in, and holding grounds and also mainstream nutrition in all aspects of extension.
3. The MOAL&F should collaborate with local and international partners to improve overall health for a more healthy and strong population in order to improve agricultural production.
4. There is a need for the National Council for Population and Development (NCPD) to undertake advocacy activities on the need to invest in family planning and reproductive health in order to improve families' well-being at the household level which may ultimately help in slowing population growth in areas most affected by food insecurity.

Conclusion

It is now clear that interventions aimed at slowing the rate of population growth through increasing investments in family planning and reproductive health coupled with those aimed at upscaling food production will not only improve the health of families but will also provide a long term solution to enhance food security in Kenya.

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