



**Association of  
Former International  
Civil Servants of  
the United Nations (Kenya)**

# Food Security in Kenya: Addressing the President's agenda\*

## KEY MESSAGES

- Attaining food security in the short, medium and long term is a challenging task that requires the concerted efforts of all stakeholders for it to be achieved.
- Previous food security policies, programmes, projects, and initiatives have had mixed results. Hence, going forward, "business-as-usual" initiatives should not be an option.
- Changing people's attitudes and responding to climate change will be key to improving both the crop and livestock production sub-sectors.
- Adopting appropriate measures and technologies in all food security subsectors will be critical. For example, crop varieties that are more drought-tolerant should be recommended. Likewise, more efficient and effective soil, water and feed conservation technologies should be promoted.
- Improving access to affordable crop and livestock insurance products should be implemented.
- Increasing Kenya's investments in agriculture to at least 10 per cent of their national budget, as called for in the Maputo Declaration, will be key to enhancing food security. The agriculture sector has immense potential to open up new job opportunities through agribusiness development, especially in the rural areas.

Policy Brief

March 2018

## 1. Introduction

Some of the policy matters raised here are key issues that the country needs to explore to make progress in reaching self-sufficiency in food security. Although some might argue that achieving this goal is a dream, there are examples from other developing countries that have achieved this goal by implementing appropriate policies, and these country examples can guide Kenya in developing its own strategy.

## 2. Background

About half of Kenya's population is poor, and some 7.5 million people live in extreme poverty, while over 10 million people suffer from chronic food insecurity and poor nutrition. In recent years, it has also been estimated that between two and four million people require emergency food assistance at any given time. Nearly 30 per cent of Kenya's children are classified as undernourished, and micronutrient deficiencies are widespread (Government of Kenya, 2011). In its awareness of this issue, the Government of Kenya is strongly committed to reducing hunger and malnutrition, including by making efforts to build self-reliance to reduce chronic food insecurity, along with measures to assist those in need when emergencies occur; but to date these initiatives have fallen short.

The past attempts by Kenya to deal with food insecurity have included tackling the four dimensions of food security: availability, accessibility, stability, and meeting nutritional requirements; however, it has had little success on any of these fronts. The approach to food security has combined longer-term action to enhance productive potential and incomes, with programmes and policies that respond to immediate needs of the poor and food insecure.

The country's frequent droughts and flash floods have also continued to frustrate efforts to remedy the situation and have exacerbated food insecurity. The problem of food insecurity will be further complicated by climate change. The projected increase in temperatures and rainfall variability will have negative impacts on crop and livestock enterprises in most areas. Disease and pests associated with high temperatures are also likely to increase. Adaptation interventions that enhance farming communities' resilience to climate-change-induced effects are critical for the realization of the principal objectives of any attempts to address food security in the country. Ultimately, there is need for a paradigm shift from our old ways of doing things in order to achieve this noble goal of food security.

*\* I want to acknowledge with thanks the AFICS-Kenya experts and their associates who contributed to this brief, namely Mr. Joram M. Gicheru, Dr. Joyce Meme, Prof. Linda Ethanghatta, Prof. G. Mwabu, Mr. G. Mburathi, Mr. Stanley Kimereh and Ms. Brigette Hillen. The views, thoughts and opinions expressed in this brief belong solely to the contributors and not necessarily to AFICS-Kenya*

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### 3. Recurrent food insecurity challenges

At the current time, Kenya finds itself yet again confronting a food security challenge. This is because of the current prolonged drought, which has affected food production and is inflicting hunger on an estimated 3.4 million Kenyans (Kanyi, 2018). Millions of animals, both domestic and wild, are also suffering the devastating effects of delayed rains. The worst affected counties are mostly those at the Coast, in northern Kenya and Rift Valley, numbering some 19 in total, where rains have been inadequate for six years. In some counties, the situation is particularly dire. For instance, in Kajiado County, up to 130,000 households and more than 600,000 cattle are at risk of starvation. Tana River County has lost 15 per cent of its livestock. There is need for an emergency package to tackle the problem; the Ministry of Devolution and Planning is spearheading efforts in this direction, assisted by other stakeholders such as the Kenya Red Cross.

Persistent drought and resultant poverty and high food prices mean that hunger remains an everyday challenge for many Kenyans, of whom someone third are children. Although there have been many initiatives and activities to remedy the problem, the challenges remain. The harsh reality is that poor crop husbandry, post-harvest losses, drought and other climate-related disasters and other root causes of food insecurity – are not going to go away. What needs to change is the way the country responds to the issues. Short, medium and long-term interventions are needed to deal with climate-related risks: interventions that make it possible for citizens to have minimal disruptions to their lives.

The present brief outlines some ideas about what might be done to ensure that Kenya is adequately prepared to achieve food security in the short, medium and long term. The brief is put forward as a contribution by the Association of Former International Civil Servants of the United Nations (AFICS), Nairobi, to the question of food security in the short, medium and long term in the country.

The Government of Kenya has made commendable efforts to link relief supplies with long-term development efforts, and, in turn, these have helped to mitigate the potential impact of future emergencies. To this end, the government has, over the years, developed many policy documents, including the Constitution of Kenya (GoK, 2010), which enshrines citizens' right to food. The latest of the official government documents on food security is the Food and Nutrition Security Policy (GoK, 2011), which provides an overarching framework covering the multiple dimensions of food security and nutrition improvement. It set out a policy framed in the context of basic human rights, child rights and women's rights, including the universal "Right to Food".

One of the reasons for the increase in the country's food insecurity may be population growth, yet the issue of population does not explain the whole situation. The decline in food production can also be attributed to other factors, such as inappropriate policies, inadequate investment, climate change and lack of commitment by the implementing agencies.

### 4. Lessons learned

Food insecurity in Kenya is characterized by widespread chronic hunger and malnutrition, combined with recurrent and acute food crises. Smallholder farmers, who produce over 90 per cent of the continent's food supply, make up more than half of the Kenyan population. The rest of the food-insecure population consists of the landless poor in rural areas and the urban poor (Mwaniki, 2005).

Food security issues need to be viewed in the context of the larger, general agricultural sector, which consists of food production (both crops and livestock), and other agricultural enterprises, including cash crops. It would be useful to examine the role of cash crops and to see how they affect and compete with food production. The direct competition between cash crops and food production is an important link that must be carefully examined. It is sometimes argued, for example, that if cash crop farming is profitable enough farmers will be able to purchase foodstuffs from their earnings from cash crop farming.

Land fragmentation, tenure systems and urbanization have been other major driving forces behind food insecurity in the country. A significant proportion of land previously used for food production has been converted to real estate development, thereby reducing the land available for food production. This calls for the immediate implementation of a land-use master plan that clearly delimits the country's agricultural land and that also sets aside land for urban settlement and other uses. The smaller the farming units become, the smaller the yield.

There are also gender issues which affect cash crop farming. For example, there are situations where men earn money from cash crops and divert it to other uses instead of purchasing foodstuffs for the family or re-investing the proceeds in their cash crop business. The empowerment of women, most particularly in the area of land access, could increase the country's overall productivity, resulting in improved food security.

#### *Nutrition and food security*

Undernutrition is well documented as an underlying cause of morbidity and mortality in children. These children suffer from impaired physical and mental development and cannot,

therefore, perform to their full potential. In later years, they will grow up into adults of limited functional capacity. The Global Hunger Index (2017) gives a clear indication of the direct impact of the quality of food consumed in Kenya especially by the low-income population. Low total calorie consumption is a consequence of low nutrient density in the diets of impoverished households, with limited micronutrients (vitamins and minerals). Micronutrient deficiency (such as iron, iodine, zinc, among others) leads to poor cognitive development in infants and children. Among other indicators of human development, poor nutrition is partly responsible for Kenya's low ranking of 0.548 on the human development index measured by UNDP in 2015, placing it among the low human development group of countries (UNDP, 2015). This trend in the human development index should be a matter of significant concern to the country's leaders.

#### *Smallholder farmers*

Smallholder farmers contribute about 90 per cent of the country's food basket. These farmers could benefit from well-designed and educative extension programmes aimed at increasing their productivity and incomes. These would include advice on the choice of new and appropriate drought-tolerant crops, the choice of seeds, water requirements, as well as education on the local effects of climate change, seasonal shifts and weather patterns, among others.

#### *Interaction between food security and development*

The challenges in food supply are linked with economic development issues. Although the dynamics of food production, agricultural development and economic growth are imperfectly understood, in this brief we maintain that food security and socioeconomic development are intricately linked, and that meaningful progress on one cannot be sustained without concomitant progress on the other.

Development policies and approaches still do not adequately reflect the intersection of food security challenges. Traditional public programmes, projects, initiatives and interventions have separated and compartmentalized agricultural development, food security, nutrition and social protection, and have not effectively linked food security policy with long-term agricultural development. The various sectors involved in food security – including government, the private sector and civil society – have not been well coordinated within or across their respective sectors. This has reduced the effectiveness of investments and delayed progress on solving the long-term challenges of food insecurity and poverty. There will be need for improved coordination if better results are to be achieved in the next four or five years.

Investments in agriculture are vital if food security is to be increased. The pathways by which these investments are translated into food security may be complex and multiple.

Boosting productivity, however, increases rural incomes and lowers food prices, making food more accessible to the poor. Other investments, such as in improved irrigation, planting of drought-tolerant crops and adoption of appropriate soil and water conservation measures, would greatly contribute to mitigating the impact of drought.

Nutritionally improved crops give access to better diets, in particular through bio-fortification that improves crop nutrient content. The contributions that agriculture makes to food security need to be complemented by medium-term programmes to raise incomes of the poor, together with insurance and safety nets, including food aid, to protect the chronic and transitory poor (World Bank, 2007).

## **5. Tackling household food insecurity: best practices**

### *Experience of Viet Nam*

Is food security achievable? Several countries have been able to achieve food security in a few years, notably Viet Nam. Viet Nam moved from being a food importer to a net food exporter in about three decades. In the early 1980s, Viet Nam was one of the world's poorest countries with stagnant economic growth and a high prevalence of poverty and hunger due to the insufficiency of food production, especially rice (Adams, 2002). Since 1989, however, Viet Nam has become one of the world's largest rice exporters. Although the share of agriculture in its total GDP is declining, agriculture and fisheries are still considered the backbone of the economy (Nhat, 2008). This is because these sectors continue significantly to provide income for the rural people and raw materials for food processing industries.

### *Experience of Ghana*

Ghana's accelerated growth is a direct result of a better economic policy and a better investment climate, combined with high commodity prices. In 2001–2005, agriculture outperformed the services sector, growing at 5.7 per cent a year, faster than overall GDP at 5.2 per cent.

Agricultural growth has been mainly due to area expansion, with yields increasing modestly at 1 per cent, mainly from cocoa (although cocoa accounts for only 10 per cent of total crop and livestock production values, it contributed about 30 per cent of agricultural growth) and horticulture (almost 9 per cent of total exports in 2006), driven mostly by pineapples. Both cocoa and pineapples are smallholder-based, and the poverty reduction associated with recent growth appears particularly strong among cash-crop growers.

Ghana is one of the few sub-Saharan Africa countries to register a sustained positive growth in per capita food production and declining food prices since 1990. There

is evidence in the country, however, of environmental degradation and unsustainable natural resource use. Food crop and livestock production needs to intensify to sustain current rates of agricultural growth and to benefit more of the population. Rising total factor and labour productivity and growing fertilizer use over the past 10 years are positive indicators of such a process (World Bank, 2007).

#### **Employment gains and reduced poverty in rural Senegal**

Fresh fruit and vegetable exports from Senegal to the European Union (EU) increased significantly in the last 15 years, despite the tightening of sanitary and phytosanitary standards. Senegal's main export is French beans, which account for 42 per cent of the country's fresh fruit and vegetable exports, more than doubling from 3,000 tons in 1991 to 7,000 tons in 2005. Compliance with the EU sanitary and phytosanitary standards puts pressure on exporters to invest more to meet the standards and to increase vertical coordination with downstream buyers (to ensure markets) and upstream suppliers (to guarantee food safety, quality, and the timing of production). Increased vertical coordination led to a shift from contract farming with smallholders to large-scale estate production in agro-industrial farms.

The incidence of contract farming declined (from 23 to 10 per cent of participating households), but employment in estate farms increased (from 10 to 34 per cent of households). While contract farming favoured larger farmers, poorer households participated as farm workers. Participation in fresh fruit and vegetable export production, whether as workers or contract farmers, raised household incomes. Estate farm workers had incomes 1.2–2.3 million CFA francs higher than non-participating households, while contract farmers had incomes between 2.4 million and 4.1 million CFA francs higher.

#### **Rwanda's strategy for food security**

Rwanda has made great strides towards achievement of food security within the period of a few years. One of the

key strategies used to achieve this progress has been the conduct of mutual accountability and joint sector reviews to align and add value to the national agriculture and food security investment plans. A sector-wide approach has benefited the country, enabling it to tap the synergies of both the public and private sectors in pushing forward realization of the country's food security.

## **6. Proposed food security measures**

In order to mitigate and improve the food security situation in the country, the following are some of the proposed interventions that could be put in place.

### **(a) (a) Increased agricultural investments, policy review and adherence to the Maputo and Malabo Declarations**

Increased investments in agriculture and reviews of the existing policy and regulatory framework will need to be fast-tracked in order to accelerate realization of the food security agenda. Years of declining investment in agriculture by the countries have reduced growth in agriculture, placing them in food-deficit situations. Kenya, for example, needs to implement the provision in the Maputo and Malabo Declarations of having at least 10 per cent investment by national budgets in agriculture. This will enable the country to move steadily towards achieving these international commitments.

A few of the Kenyan counties have already set a sterling example by making significant budget allocations to agriculture. A good example is that of Makueni, whose county government has invested heavily in a fruit processing plant to support its farmers in processing and marketing of its fruits (see box).

#### **Box 1:**

#### **Makueni fruit processing plant roars into life**

The engines have roared into life. The long-awaited Makueni Fruit Processing Plant is now a reality. The plant has a capacity to process 5 metric tons of raw mangoes producing 3,000 litres of puree (mango concentrate) per hour. A litre of the concentrate fetches KES 150 in the market place.

Before devolution, the idea of establishing a fruit processing plant in Makueni to help fruit farmers to stem wastage and raise incomes was only a cherished dream. The power and opportunity to allocate public resources of the magnitude required to realize this were lacking, however, and the idea remained a dream. Dreams not achieved turned into nightmares during the peak seasons when mango prices dipped to three shillings per piece.

This factory will provide opportunities for local farmers and investors to own a stake and grow their wealth, learn new technologies and learn about value addition to increase farm incomes. Local farmers are the primary stakeholders of the plant. The Department of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries is now tasked with enhancing the quality of the fruit, controlling the fruit fly and educating farmers to ensure that the fruit processed in the plant is compliant with EU standards.

***(b) Aligning national and county governments' policies and strategies***

With agriculture and food security being a devolved function, there is a need to harmonize national and county governments' policies and strategies. This harmonization would ensure better coordination of the interventions between the national and county governments, resulting in effective implementation of the food security agenda. The county integrated development plans should be aligned with the national medium-term development plan of the country's Vision 2030. This will ensure that synergy is created and funds are efficiently steered towards fulfilment of the national agenda.

***(c) Promote use of idle land through lease agreements***

The national government should consider policies that convince the people who have large areas of idle arable land in various parts of the country to rent their plots for commercial agricultural use, such as growing food and other related crops. An instructive example of what happens when arable land lies unused may be seen in Zimbabwe, where the taking of land from productive white farmers to give to black Zimbabweans who were absentee landlords resulted in a major food deficit.

***(d) Strengthened extension services, education and other outreach programmes***

Experience from countries currently providing extension services indicates that they contribute to deepening the knowledge of smallholder farmers and improving their output. Specifically, a focus should be placed on disseminating critical information through demonstrations in such areas as quality of seed, fertilizer regimes and others inputs.

Education and outreach should be developed to disseminate information about climate change, drought and seasonal shifts. Information and advice on new, drought-tolerant crops, specific locational crop varieties and their various specific needs and water requirements must be brought to the people in a language that the local community understands. Furthermore, issues pertaining to environmental degradation and how to mitigate its effects need to be addressed, while local communities need to be encouraged to adopt improved and appropriate technologies and innovations.

***(e) Innovative insurance schemes***

In order to assist farmers through times of poor harvest and ill health, innovative and affordable insurance schemes should be developed and implemented. These

would include crop and livestock production insurance and medical health insurance to cover poor harvest periods and climate related shocks.

***(f) Market-driven production system, processing, product development and packaging***

The agriculture sector need to reconfigure its production system from a supply approach to a market-oriented and demand-driven approach. Producers should understand the market demand, using information that is timely and detailed and factor this into the planning phase. They need reliable information that is up to date on quality standards, sanitary and phytosanitary requirements (food safety and plant health), price indicators, and production volumes among others.

***(g) Improving infrastructure (especially roads and markets)***

Rural road development has the potential to reduce transport costs, postharvest losses and generate market activity. The renovation of roads in Viet Nam increased the variety of food that was available in the market – fruits, vegetables and meat – and encouraged greater participation in trade and services. In Georgia, the construction and rehabilitation of roads increased opportunities for off-farm and female employment. Simulation modelling in Madagascar has suggested that the country could increase rice production by 1 per cent if the time taken to travel on roads was halved.

***(h) Reducing post-harvest losses***

The food security challenge is exacerbated by the post-harvest losses that are incurred by stakeholders along the value chain. With the surge in food prices in the country, overcoming post-harvest losses has re-emerged as a vital part of the broader undertaking to ensure food security. Activities that could be mounted to reduce these losses include the promotion of good agricultural practices and good manufacturing practices.

***(i) Engendering participation of women and youth in food security***

Attainment of food security in the country will be accelerated through an inclusive approach, involving women and young people in agricultural programmes. Specific policy measures are required to address the constraints facing women and young farmers. Some of the interventions include ensuring that women have equal access to factors of production; facilitating women's access to agricultural services; promoting the adoption of appropriate technologies and mechanization to free up women's time for income-generating activities;

improving the nutritional status of women and youth; and providing better employment and income-earning opportunities, among others.

#### *(j) Fostering public-private partnerships*

Private sector investment has the potential not only to raise productivity, enhance food security and lift rural people out of poverty, but also to create jobs in both the service and production sectors, thus stimulating broader rural development.

Public-private partnerships (PPPs) will be an important institutional mechanism for increasing investments in food security, sharing risks, and addressing other constraints in pursuit of sustainable agricultural development. Some of the initiatives designed to promote strong PPPs in the agricultural sector include providing a clear legal, regulatory and institutional framework that can protect such initiatives.

#### *(k) Innovative technologies to professionalize the agricultural sector*

Currently, in countries and regions that are net food exporters, such as Western Europe, USA, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, farmers are professionals, usually from families that have been doing this work for generations. In this context, young people who have studied agriculture and related subjects should be encouraged and supported in taking up farming as a profession. This is an urgent need, and, in the short to long term, such a policy should help to address not only food insecurity but also to reduce unemployment. The more extensive use of information and communications technology in agricultural programmes would attract more young people to this sector.

## 7. Conclusion

- Being innovative, integrating natural resource management and addressing climate change adaptation will improve food security, reduce risks to agricultural systems and

increase the resilience of vulnerable households. Stronger partnerships and an all-inclusive approach with the relevant stakeholders both in the public (national and county governments) and private sectors will leverage the scarce resources needed to achieve a more effective and efficient food security system within the agricultural development sector. The Makueni case is instructive in this respect.

- In addition, adherence to the commitments under the Maputo Declaration, by which the Kenyan Government and other African Union member countries undertook to increase their agricultural budgets to not less than 10 per cent of the national budgets, must be accelerated now more than ever before. This will make available the resources required to increase agricultural investments that will drive forward the progressive realization of the food security agenda on the President's Big Four, as envisaged in the Kenya Food and Nutrition Security Policy.
- In short, the biggest challenge faced by food security has not been the lack of food security policies and strategic plans but the lack of commitment in the implementation of these plans. To reverse this trend will now require the commitment of all the parties involved to demonstrate mutual accountability in the sustained achievement of the food security agenda with clear indicators within set timelines. This calls for a paradigm shift from the previous approach to a new strategy that is transparent, accountable and verifiable, with the aim of achieving food security as demonstrated by the examples mentioned earlier, namely, Ghana, Rwanda, Senegal and Viet Nam. The success of this pillar will require the mutual accountability of all relevant stakeholders, including development partners, if the stated goals are to be attained.
- AFICS would like to register its commitment to this cause by offering to the Government of Kenya its pool of experts, with their wealth of experience, to support the realization of this very important pillar on the President's Big Four Agenda. The AFICS multi-disciplinary team is available to join other key stakeholders in an all-out endeavour to ensure the achievement of food security in Kenya.

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