



RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE EAST POKOT COMMUNITY'S FOOD SECURITY SITUATION: AN ANALYSIS OF
A MARGINALISED COMMUNITY OF EAST POKOT IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

The Pokot community inhabiting the eastern part of Baringo County in Kenya has for a long time experienced enduring periods of food insecurity. This experience has at times culminated in severe hunger and malnutrition. As a coping mechanism, women have, on several occasions, resorted to boiling poisonous fruits from wild trees to feed children and the aged people. Furthermore, the community faces harsh environmental conditions and challenges of cross-border conflicts with its neighbouring counties aggravating the already serious food insecurity situation and marginalising it further in terms of food production and accessibility. The objective of this study was therefore to assess the frequency of access to food by household members, to assess the role of the government in food security to establish the level of the agricultural extension services in food production, and to establish the structural impact of food security on the community. Using a survey design, data was obtained by use of an interview schedule from a sample of 100 respondents drawn from a sample frame of desegregated households selected using a proportionate sampling technique. The study hypothesised that there is an association between food insecurity and access to education, that there is a relationship between food insecurity and conflict. Data was analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively. The Chi-Square χ^2 was used to test the variables at a significance level of 0.05. This study is significant because a section of the Kenyan population, in a number of marginal districts is faced with challenges related to food security. Furthermore, it is more significant in view of the rising national population without food which calls for increased food production to meet the increased demand. The study will assist the government to redesign its food distribution policy within the framework of national food security policy particularly for marginal communities.

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INTRODUCTION

For the last four decades, the rate of growth in food production has lagged behind that of food demand in 30 out of the 41 sub-Saharan countries. This is due to the high population growth which averages about 3 per cent or more per annum (Republic of Kenya, Population Census and Housing Report 2009). Food availability and accessibility is important and to achieve development, food security is necessary. Its achievement and sustainability needs efforts by members of the community themselves who must mobilise their own resources. However, for these efforts to be fruitful, government efforts must also be mobilised through various line ministries and departments to unite with the efforts of the people to achieve food security. There are several reasons why this has not been realised in East Pokot district. The unreliable rainfall, harsh weather conditions and the insecurity situation in the region fuelled by cattle rustling has made the achievement of food security difficult. The inhabitants of the East Pokot have therefore continued to rely on the efforts of the government and International Organizations to provide relief food through specialised programmes. However, programmes run by the government have been sporadic to the extent of not meeting the demand for food. This gap in capacity has been filled by the International Non-Governmental Organizations. These organizations have the skills, organizational capacity, structures and experience to distribute and provide food to the needy. They have in the recent months stepped up efforts to address emergency food needs by promoting sustainable development amongst the East Pokot communities.

They have done this by addressing these needs through emergence food and non-food item distribution. The focus of paper is therefore to find out how food insecurity has marginalised the East Pokot community in terms of education, access to opportunities and other social services.

Understanding the Food Security in East Pokot District

Food is an important commodity to humanity. It a basic need and essentially an alienable human right. The East Pokot community, inhabiting the eastern part of the larger Baringo district in Kenya is a community that faces a number of challenges in accessing and producing food. The larger Baringo district incorporating East Pokot, was initially placed under Emergency Operation Programme (EMOP) between October 2004 and August 2005 following consecutive failed seasons of rainfall from 2004. This is an operation that targets people who are food insecure and therefore in need of assistance. During the first phase of EMOP (October 2004-March 2005) food was provided to 34,846 beneficiaries in all divisions except Kabarnet in the lower Baringo district. However, during the second phase (April-August 2005) the beneficiaries were scaled down to 26,591 and the target areas were basically the whole of East Pokot (Nginyang and Kollowa) including areas around Marigat, Mukutuni and Bartabwa divisions (Musili, Ochieng and Barasa, 2007). These areas were seen as food insecure despite the completion of the first phase of EMOP. During the two phases, a total of 2,187.58MT of food, cereals, Corn Soya Blend (CSB), Salt pulses and vegetable oil were distributed. After being implemented for a period of two years, EMOP was phased out after an improvement in the food security situation as a result of the good performance of the 2005 long rain season.

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However, the food security situation deteriorated rapidly following failure of the 2005 short rains. Due to this, EMOP was reinstated in February 2005 covering East Pokot and 5 other divisions providing food to 30 per cent of the population at 50 per cent ration. A total of 40,313 needy people received food assistance until end of February 2007 when EMOP was faced out (Musili, Ochieng and Barasa (2007).

Food Distribution Partnership between the Government and the Civil Society

Food distribution to the affected people in the marginal districts is a complex and expensive undertaking and its successful operation is dependent on many factors. The government in collaboration with International Non-Governmental Organizations such as the World Vision, Action Aid, UNICEF, Red Cross and other Faith-Based Organizations in particular Churches often join efforts to supply and distribute relief food to food insecure communities residing in East Pokot district. Food distributed include; maize ration, beans, cooking fats, salt, *unimix* and *ujimix*, powdered milk, tinned beef, canned and salted fish. Although the government attempts to meet its obligation in distributing relief foods it faces structural and logistical challenges in the distribution process. It also faces further challenges of transporting relief food from the central government stores to the site, a situation that has affected delivery of food to the affected people and therefore marginalising them further. Initially relief food was distributed through the Provincial Administration, especially Chiefs and their assistants. The provincial administration is a department in the Ministry of Internal Security in the Government of Kenya charged with coordinating local administrative and development issues on behalf of the central government.

However, the staff of the department at the grassroots level lack logistical, structural, technical skills and capacity in handling complicated operations. They also lack the basic competence in planning and effecting a distribution network and in handling emergence issues. Furthermore, the logistical incompetence in terms of storage and handling leads to food insecure and hence people missing food. This has led to a shift in the distribution of food to the affected people by allowing the INGOs to play a bigger role in the distribution process. International NGOs have greater logistical capacity and technical competence in handling complex emergence food distribution operations involving high volumes of food. Furthermore, they are guided by high professional and ethical standards in the discharge of their mandate which is undertaken effectively and efficiently.

Factors Influencing Food Security

There are a number of factors that influence food security in East Pokot district. Drought, livestock diseases and cattle rustling are among the most common factors that impact negatively on food security among the residents of East Pokot. The study found out that some 83 per cent of the respondents who owned animals as a food security measure lost about 50 per cent of them due to diseases and drought. The government has a duty and obligation to provide food to its people including provision of the infrastructure to facilitate its production. Cattle rustling menace, especially around the plains, has raised serious security concerns. The Turkana and Pokot community from the neighbouring district of West Pokot often raid the East Pokot community for cattle further complicating the food security situation.

The Coping Mechanisms of the East Pokot Community

The expansive area of Pokot East district experiences long dry spells. It is almost arid with water being the single most commodity that is quite scarce. According to Kiptui (2008), this prolonged water deficiency force the inhabitants to evolve numerous coping mechanisms or strategies that assume various forms of behavioural

changes focusing on the exploitation of the available plant resources. The emergence of dry weather leads to a sequence of response activities by the inhabitants of Nginyang. As the spell advances to drought and the pasture becomes scarce, the pastoralists move to nearby hills and mountains to exploit the pasture and water resources. To cope with the decreasing food due to drought, the local people gather wild fruits for food. These are used to supplement the main grain and livestock food stuffs. This is mainly done by women and children who traverse the lowlands and the surrounding highlands. During severe drought the men join in the search for wild fruits and vegetables. These fruits become abundant and act as a sign or predictor of droughts and therefore an advance warning signal that crops would fail and therefore prepare people psychologically to face the impending drought (*Ibid*, 2008). These wild fruits are toxic and poisonous. The local people have, over the years, evolved elaborate mechanisms to neutralize the toxicity in the fruits to allow consumption. One of the wild toxic fruits widely eaten by the local inhabitants known as *Sororichoi* is usually boiled for a whole day to reduce toxicity. On a regular one to two hour's intervals, the poison saturated water would be poured out and fresh water added into the container to continue boiling for another two hours. To reduce the poison further, other neutralizing herbs such as pieces of fig tree bark would be added into the boiling pots. Such herbs also have the effect of increasing the rate of poison extraction. After several hours of boiling, the fruits are left to cool and consumed by the family as a meal (*Ibid*, 2008).

Exploitation of Underground Wild Insects

Although the area is arid, it has some spells of rain which causes floods and destruction to the soil cover. During this time white ants appear from the ant-hills. These are collected dried and eaten as food. The process of harvesting them include lighting fire using tightly tied special wooden bundles near the anti-hill at night. This attracts and directs the ants towards a relatively shallow hole dug out for that purpose. Once the hole is full, the white ants are scooped and put in sacks. At home they are dried, fried and mixed with honey and stored for consumption during famine periods (*Ibid*, 2008).

Food Relief in Kenya

In the recent past, Kenya has experienced periodic shortfalls in per capita food production. Kenyans have managed to keep abreast of their food requirements at a considerable cost in terms of financial outlay and foreign dependency (Nangulu, 2011). Purchased cereal imports increased from 15,00 metric tons in 1974 to 188,000 metric tons in 1990; and cereal food aid grew by nearly three times as much, from 2,000 metric tons in 1974/1975 to 62,000 metric tons in 1989/1990 (Miller and Yeager, 1994). Although maize is a staple food, Kenya fell short of maize self sufficiency in 1978 (*Ibid*:1994). In 1980 Kenya's food situation worsened forcing the government to import large quantities of maize, wheat and milk in order to meet the domestic shortfall. As a result of persistent food shortages Kenya has, from time to time, appealed to both the developed countries and international agencies for assistance. In the few past years, countries such as the United States, Germany and France including other multilateral organizations such as Food and Agricultural Organizations have provided Kenya with food aid to be distributed to those marginal areas such as East Pokot. As a matter of fact, the causes of decline in food production relative to need are not always explicitly understood (Nangulu, 2011). The issues are complex and include, economic, social, climatic, political, security and environmental factors along with population pressure. However, the government's inability to plan and strengthen food production policy has also contributed to the situation.

Kenya's National Food Policy

It is difficult to discuss Kenya's food situation without discussing the role of agriculture in Kenya's National Food Policy. The agricultural

sector is the engine of economic development in Kenya accounting for 25 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product and employing over 80 per cent of the Kenyan population either directly or indirectly (Government of Kenya, 2003). In the last four decades agriculture has declined by 3.5 per cent and the economy by 4.6 per cent (Government of Kenya, 2002). The thrust of Kenya's food policy is on food self-sufficiency, food security and nutritional adequacy of the diet (Government of Kenya, 1981, 1986, 1994, 2004). Kenya's national food strategy is meant to satisfy four basic objectives: - efficient growth in food and agricultural sectors, improved income distribution, satisfactory nutrition for the entire population and adequate food security (Timmer, 1981). For instance, in 1981 the Kenya Government in Sessional Paper No. 4 of (1981) set out a statement of national food policy with objectives of broad self-sufficiency in the main foodstuffs; security of food supply for the country; and foodstuffs distribution for a nutritionally adequate diet. Kenya's food policy document was reviewed in Sessional Papers No. 1 of 1986 and No. 2 of 1994 to improve focus and response to changing demand. However, key elements of the policy have remained the same and continue to revolve around food availability, accessibility and nutritional adequacy.

Viewed from its own dimension, Kenya's National Food Policy is very comprehensive since it incorporates components related to food production except one of the objectives. Although it highly focuses on food availability, the per capita availability of food does not always mean access to food by all. It fails to consider income distribution as a major determinant of food policy. This is a serious omission because the ability to access food depends to a larger extent on the ability of households and individuals to produce food or when they are engaged in gainful employment. Kenya's food policy can be sub-divided into several policy elements namely: agricultural input policy, food security policy, food trade policy, nutritional policy, credit policy and research-extension policy. Food systems are complicated, and food policy is therefore dependent on powerful macroeconomic policies and the international economy. A workable food policy should focus: targeted food subsidies, food price, public investment in agricultural productivity and productive jobs. Maize is the main staple commodity in the country and critical for food security. National food policy and the ability to meet the country's food security needs is therefore a major concern and must target maize production. The majority of Kenyan's are food insecure due to inadequate strategic reserves in major food commodities such as maize and lack of proper distribution systems that can facilitate the efficient movement of such commodities from surplus to deficient areas. As a result of this constraints most people have no access to adequate quantities of food and what they have access to has poor nutritional value (Alila and Atieno, 2006). With this background the study sought to establish a number of factors as reflected in the objectives.

Objectives of the Study

- To establish the level of food availability in households
- To examine the level of the government and International Organization's intervention in food security situation
- To assess the impact of insecurity situation to food production
- To establish the coping mechanisms of the respondents
- To establish the impact of food insecurity to households

Description of the study site

East Pokot has one of the lowest population densities in the country of with an average of about 20 persons per Km². (Republic of Kenya, East Pokot District Development Plan 2008-2012, p.8-9). This reflects the nomadic nature life of the community. This nomadic life is basically not suitable for agricultural activities and production. The district is an arid area with extremely harsh climatic conditions. These conditions are deficient of moisture that can support

sustainable agriculture. The vegetation is scanty due unreliable rainfall and the soils are generally poor. However, when rainfall occurs it is characterised by huge torrents lasting a very short duration.

Research Instruments

The study used structured interview schedule. Key informants were also used to collaborate the data collected. The Interview schedules were selected by the researcher as instruments for collecting data because they were found to be easier to use and administer to the respondents. They were also found to be easier to analyse since they were in an immediate usable form. Furthermore they were more flexible than questionnaires because the interviewer got more information by using probing questions. In addition to this they yielded good response rates (Mugenda and Mugenda, 1999 p. 83-84). Probing questions were used to make it easier for the respondents to answer questions. Probe questions encourage respondents to extend or amplify a partial, irrelevant or inaccurate response and to stimulate them to answer a question (Sarantakos, 2005, p.278). They were also found to be effective and convenience. The instruments were designed for this particular research and appropriate permission was provided for their use.

Selection of Key Informants

The researcher selected two Key informants from the two sub-locations. They were selected on the basis of their knowledge in household food management and their leadership positions. The two were also respected elders who retired as assistant chiefs in the Government of Kenya. Their role was to provide information related to food situation in the study area and how the food gap created by the inability of the government to provide it was being handled by the International Organizations. They provided very useful information to the study.

Sampling Procedure

Purposive sampling was used in selecting the division for the study. The choice of the study area was guided by the researcher's opinion based on the relevance of the area to the study objective. Nginyang division was purposively chosen from among the three divisions in the district because of its proximity to Turkana district to the north and because of the dynamics of the weather patterns relevant to the study objectives. A further purposive sampling procedure was used to select the location of Silale and the two sub-locations of Kapeda East and Kapeda West from which the study sample was drawn. These two sub-locations are suitable because of their extreme weather conditions and proximity to Turkana district. Furthermore, the terrain and road infrastructure is very poor reflecting the neglect by the authorities. A sampling frame was developed from the population of 1000 persons from which a sample of 60 respondents was obtained from 120 disaggregated households. A systematic sampling procedure was used to select the 60 respondents from the 120 households. The selection of the sample was based on a number of factors such as education, occupation, leadership positions, and availability and access to food. The respondents were mainly males because due to cultural considerations that are very strong, it was difficult to interview the females.

Data Collection Techniques

The study used primary and secondary techniques in collecting data. Data was collected quantitatively and qualitatively because of the relative illiteracy level of the respondents and because of security purposes where visitors are viewed with suspicion. Furthermore, the need to employ the technique was to enable the researcher to go beyond the quantitative use of interview schedule to capture information that could not have easily been collected when using an interview schedule. Data was also collected from secondary sources

including the Population and Census Report, 209, The East Pokot District Development Plan, 2008-2012, the Economic Review, 2012, The researcher also used other materials from the Margaret Thatcher Library at Moi University, Eldoret, Kenya.

Focus Group Discussion

Focus Group Discussion is a qualitative research technique frequently used to map out systems to answer the 'why' and 'how' questions not adequately answered in closed or open-ended survey questionnaires. The method utilises face to face discussion between the researcher and the respondents in a group. This technique relies on group dynamics and allows a small group of respondents to be guided by a skilled moderator into increasing levels of focus and depth of critical issues of the research topic. It increases the motivation of members to address critical issues and allows significant attitudes and feelings to emerge (Sarantakos, 2005). Furthermore, It offers information about group processes, spontaneous feelings, reasons and explanations for attitudes and behaviour, the attitudes and opinions of group members (*Ibid*, 2005).

The discussants were purposively selected and briefly interviewed to determine their inclusion in the groups. The reason for such an interview was to make sure that a son and his father were not included in the group. To include the relatives in one group would not encourage them discuss freely. It was also meant to determine their age bracket in order to select those within a given age of 18 years and above and to ensure that only respondents falling within the study area were included so as to eliminate visitors in the homesteads from attending the discussions. The Focus Group Discussion was tailored on the themes that inform the study objectives. Only one Focus Group Discussion was used. This was because of the security situation in the position in the study area. The group of eight respondents was meant to provide insight information on the food situation and the government efforts in meeting these challenges.

Findings and Discussions

The study had sought to examine the role of the government in providing relief food for the inhabitants of Nginyang, it also sought to establish the role of International Organisations in the provision of food, the coping mechanisms and the role of insecurity in food production by the inhabitants of Nginyang as shown in the Tables 1-4.

Table 1. Age Structure of Respondents

Age Structure	No. of Respondents	%
<22	3	5.0
23-41	30	50.0
42-60	20	33.3
61>	7	11.7
	60	100%

The study found out that the majority of the respondents interviewed were in the age bracket of between 23-41. They were all married had families and staying in a household. Those aged 61 and above were very few comprising only 11.7%. However, they provided information required to meet the study objectives.

Table 2. Education Level of the Respondents

Level of Education	No. of Respondents	%
University	0	0.0
College	2	3.3
Secondary	3	5.0
Primary	25	41.7
No education	30	50.0
	60	100%

The study findings showed that most of the respondents have not acquired university education but only 2 or 3.3% had college education. It was also observed that 41.7% of the respondents had

primary level education. The majority did not have any formal education. This is attributed to the insecurity situation in the district and the nomadic way of life. It also indicates the low level of the government's commitment towards providing education to its citizens especially to the marginal districts. As a matter of fact in the whole district the number of students in secondary schools is 11,669 (Republic of Kenya, East Pokot District Development Plan 2008-2012, p 8). The major factor affecting schooling is water, food and insecurity. Schools are also few and far wide apart. However, Non Governmental Organization's operating in the area, mainly the Faith-Based Organizations such as the World Vision and Christian Children's Fund, provide children with uniforms, text books and other schooling items to encourage schooling. At the school level, they help in the construction of classrooms or administration blocks and provide desks for classes or entire school in addition to solar panels for most schools. They have also boosted adult education although it is at a lower level. However, this is not adequate because the fundamental issue that must be addressed to attract schooling is the issue of insecurity. Due to low levels of education, the majority of the respondents do not have any high level employment. The majority are unskilled, a situation which renders them unemployable in the few positions available in the area. This finding was confirmed by Key Informants who stated that the findings was a reflection of the entire area and indeed the whole district. They confirmed that there are very few professionals in the district. However, this is being reversed through a rigorous programme to create awareness to embrace education.

Table 3. Food Production Activities

Occupation	No. of Respondents	%
Crop Farming	2	3.3
Livestock	40	66.7
Traditional Bee farming	10	16.7
Others	8	13.3
	60	100%

East Pokot district is mainly arid and hence farming activities are not possible. However, there are some pockets of good soil which can sustain food production but to a very little level due to sporadic rainfall and poor soils. Most of the population therefore depend on livestock which is also affected by ravages of drought and cattle rustling. As a matter of fact, 80 per cent of the entire population in the district is engaged in livestock activity as its the mainstay (Republic of Kenya, East Pokot Development Plan, 2008-2012, p. 10). These activities are supported by Action Aid and World Vision Organization and Arid Lands Resource Management Programme 11. The study findings showed that 70 per cent of the respondents stated that they depended on livestock as the main occupation as shown in Table 3. The researcher also wanted to establish the level of food availability in their households as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Access and Availability of Food in Households

Access to Food	No. of Respondents	%
Always	2	3.3
At times	28	46.7
No access to food	30	50.0
	60	100.0

The study found out that majority of the respondents 50% stated they have no access to food and depend on their cattle to provide them with food. They stated that it is difficult for them to practice agriculture because of the poor soils and reduced rainfall in the area. Food availability and access in East Pokot is determined by a number of factors; the security situation and the terrain of the road. Majority of the respondents stated that since they face food insecurity in the area they rely on the government to provide food aid. However, the government is unable to discharge that mandate fully because of

logistical problems which include management of the security situation. In fact 83.3% of the respondents stated that they depend on the International Non-Governmental Organization for assistance. The government's efforts is hampered by its inability to respond quickly and its low capacity. According to the respondents, the International Non Governmental Organizations that undertake the distribution of food in the area include; World Food Programme, Action Aid, World Vision, The Kenya Red Cross, The Christian Children's Fund and The Catholic Relief Agency. They provide food such as maize flour and sugar, beans, powdered milk, cooking fat, tinned meat and fish. These International Organizations work hand in hand with the government mainly to secure the legal mandate to supply relief food (Musili, Ochieng and Barasa 2007).

Table 5. Coping Mechanisms in Accessing Food

Occupation	No. of Respondents	%
Buying Food	13	21.7
Raiding the Neighbours	19	31.7
Boiling Seeds & backs of trees	21	35.0
Others	7	11.6
	60	100 %

In the absence of food, the community stated it developed a coping mechanisms. Of the 60 respondents interviewed 21.7% stated that they sell off their cattle to buy food from the lower parts of Baringo district where crop farming is done. However, 31.7% stated that they raid their neighbours to steal their cattle and sell before buying food. The majority stated that they boil some wild fruits which is then used as food for the family. Food insecurity is an undesirable situation among the residents of East Pokot. Generally, food insecurity has had negative impact on the people. It has led to most students and pupils dropping out of school. It has also contributed to the escalation of cross border conflict and cattle rustling. As a result of dropping out of school, the residents of the area miss out of the competitive job markets which require higher academic qualifications and technical training. In the long run the community is marginalised in terms of access to opportunities such as leadership, investment and education. This marginalisation is likely to persist if the government does not address the issue of food production, infrastructure and insecurity.

Recommendations

The government of Kenya needs to approach the issue of food insecurity from a number of dimensions. There is need to broaden the base of food security to the marginalised communities to a sustainable level. While the government has to employ emergence food measures by improving the mechanisms of food distribution to the needy cases, it has also to put in place some intermediary measures. Emergence food deliveries will deal with the immediate food situation by saving imminent deaths and health related issues. It should strengthen the food distribution chain by empowering people involved in the food chain and at the same time cut down the delivery time. At the same time the question of food security in East Pokot should be assessed from a national view point. This will enable planners to establish and map out which areas of the country have food sufficiency and which parts do not have food. A redistribution

plan can then be drawn to move food from food surplus areas to regions that experience food insecurity. One problem that Kenya experiences is to balance food availability in all regions. As a long term strategy, the government should plan to improve the infrastructure and open up the area to encourage trade and commerce. It should also address the recurrent issue of insecurity that has contributed to the marginalisation of the community. Total eradication of insecurity will contribute to the opening up of the district in terms of trade and commerce. People will then widen their scope and built their social capital and network. This will eventually strengthen their economic ties with other communities and reduce isolation, insecurity and marginalisation. While developing and encouraging commercial livestock development, civic education on alternative investment will empower people to reconsider relying on livestock.

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