

Policy Options to Improve Food Security in Kenya

By Florence Odiwuor, Southern Voices Network for Peacebuilding Scholar

September 2022

Introduction

Africa scores poorly in all indicators of food security. Nearly one in five people living in Africa is undernourished, the highest regional prevalence in the world. Current pressures on food systems stem from several factors: political instability, conflict, macroeconomic imbalances, unproductive farming practices, environmental degradation, poverty, population growth, gender inequality, inadequate education, unemployment, and poor governance. Additional pressures include a lack of access to farms and rangeland as well as other natural resources and poor economic policies to support food production. In addition, climate change shocks and surging food and fuel prices due to the Russia-Ukraine War have compounded the food security crisis in Africa, which is still dealing with adverse economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.¹

Food insecurity is prevalent across the continent but is especially pronounced in the Horn of Africa, East Africa, and the Sahel. While hunger has been decreasing in most regions, Africa is not currently on track to meet the African Union's goal of ending hunger by 2025. The undernourished population has been declining, but the rate of decline has been uneven across regions of the continent, with Eastern and Central regions achieving little success. Governments, the African Union, and international partners have established several response mechanisms to address food insecurity.

Current Engagements and Responses to Food Insecurity in Africa and Kenya

The African Union strategy focused on building resilient food systems for the future is based on The Malabo Declaration and the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program framework (CAADP).² This follows pledges made during a G8 meeting in 2008, where heads of states indicated the need to increase the proportion of agriculture-oriented investments for development in order to curb food insecurity.³ For their part, African governments have devised new policy strategies on food security in line with their national economic policies.

Kenya is, on paper, strongly committed to combating food insecurity through the implementation of robust policy frameworks and development goals such as the Kenya Constitution 2010, Vision 2030, Big Four Agenda, Agricultural Sector Transformation and Growth Strategy 2019-2029, and The National Food and Nutrition Security Policy 2012.⁴

The Southern Voices Network for Peacebuilding: Centering African knowledge and agency is key to building and sustaining peace in Africa. The Southern Voices Network for Peacebuilding (SVNP) works with the Wilson Center's Africa Program to attain the most appropriate, cohesive, and inclusive policy frameworks and approaches for achieving sustainable peace in Africa. Generously sponsored by Carnegie Corporation of New York since its establishment in 2011, the SVNP works to generate African knowledge to inform US and international peacebuilding policies on Africa; help build the next generation of African peacebuilders through its scholarship program; and create a pan-African network of African peacebuilding organizations, practitioners, and experts to collaborate and share knowledge, best practices, and lessons learned on peacebuilding in Africa.

This publication was made possible by a grant from Carnegie Corporation of New York. The statements made and views expressed in this paper are solely the responsibility of the author and do not represent the views of the Wilson Center or Carnegie Corporation of New York. For more information please visit:

<https://www.wilsoncenter.org/the-southern-voices-network-for-peacebuilding>



Implementation of the strategies above has been found wanting, however. Efforts to make progress are proving insufficient in the face of a more challenging and uncertain context. Within Kenya, the gap between consumption and production is projected to widen. Over 75 percent of the population depends on agriculture for their livelihood, yet agriculture is dominated by smallholder farmers caught up in under-investment and under-production cycles.⁵ Suitable land for cultivation is increasingly threatened by desertification in the North and ravaging soil erosion in the South. Drought has resulted in lost crops and an extremely high rate of livestock deaths. Declining forage and water resources have meant livestock owners continue to migrate in search of pasture and water. In parts of Kenya, the devastating impacts of climate change and widespread food shortages have contributed to hunger and triggered resource ethno-driven instability.

In 2022, Kenyans have struggled in the face of sharp food price hikes and a scarcity of staples. Arid and Semi-Arid resource (ASAL) counties have reached crisis levels of hunger—including an estimated 50 percent of the population to face high levels of food insecurity with millions of others in need of food assistance.⁶ Failings in Kenya's food system threaten peace and stability.

Countering Food Insecurity in Kenya and Africa: Key Challenges and Limitations

African governments' persistent neglect of the agricultural sector, not least in their budget allocations, has contributed to the current crisis. Locally produced commodities also struggle against low-cost imported products, negatively impacting local production structures. Farmers represent 60 percent of Kenya's active population and are on the back foot. External factors have also been a barrier to African countries' food security. Global financial institutions have advised and encouraged African governments to cut their aid and subsidies to farmers. Moreover, the infamous structural adjustment programs (SAPS) demanded by international lenders in the 1980s significantly reduced governments' ability to invest in programs to increase agricultural production, such as irrigation, research, fertilizer use, seed production, and marketing.⁷

Policy Options and Recommendations

1. The African Union (AU)

- a. Strengthen monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure all member states receive a "last-mile push" toward meeting the targets of The Malabo Declaration.

2. The Government of Kenya

- a. Establish Food Security and Peace Hubs (FSaPHs): This concept was initially drawn by a working group on peace resilience chaired by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).⁸ This idea of investment could reap significant positive dividends by upgrading smallholder farmers' production systems and strengthening their resilience. Initially established by the government or private sector in unstable communities, FSaPHs will help cement—symbolically and literally—the link between thriving agriculture and peace. It will coordinate responses and address immediate vulnerabilities, such as weather-related risks while building longer-term capacities in agricultural production by delivering new technologies, extension and advisory services, market innovations, quality inputs, and credit advisory services. FSaPHs will build on local knowledge and capacity but enjoin local, regional, and international actors engaged in humanitarian action and development work. The aim, over time, would be to expand into more stable regions.
- b. Increase budget allocation for the agriculture sector: The government should increase public expenditure on agriculture by allocating at least 10 percent of the national budget to the sector, as prescribed in The Malabo Declaration (2014).



c. **Promote youth participation in agriculture:** Most active farmers in Kenya are 60 years and above. Currently, there are no adequate opportunities in place to train, educate, and promote the next generation of Kenyan farmers. Unless this situation is urgently addressed, Kenya's food system could collapse because of the natural attrition of aging farmers. Kenya's life expectancy stands at 65 years. Agricultural education, training, and research should be expanded, and the youth incentivized to participate in agriculture.

3. The Government of Kenya, Civil Society, Food System Actors, and Peacebuilding Organizations

a. **Develop partnerships** between food system actors, civil society, and government to enhance understanding of the links between thriving agriculture and sustainable peace.

4. The G7 Research Group and Other International Partners

a. **Provide additional funding and technical support** through establishing a Food System Transformation Office, which will work with Kenya's government to address the most urgent needs in the sector. These needs include youth farmer training, fertilizer shortages, climate-smart agriculture initiatives, and building smallholder farmers' resilience through FSaPHs.

-
1. "Nothing to Eat: Food Crisis Is Soaring Across Africa," *International Committee of the Red Cross*, 2022, <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/food-crisis-soaring-across-africa>
 2. "CAADP Biennial Review Brief: Africa Agriculture Transformation Scorecard Performance and Lessons," Kenya Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Fisheries, and Irrigation, (ReSAKS-ECA, 2022), https://www.resakss.org/sites/default/files/Kenya%20CAADP%20Biennial%20Review%20Brief_jk_clean_0.pdf
 3. "Progress Report on the Implementation of the Africa Action Plan," *G8 Africa Personal Representatives*, <http://www.g7.utoronto.ca/summit/2008hokkaido/2008-apr.pdf>
 4. Mahamat Dodo, "Understanding Africa's Food Security Challenges" In *Food Security in Africa*, (London: IntechOpen, 2020), <https://www.intechopen.com/chapters/71718>
 5. Stephen P. D'Alessandro, Jorge Caballero, John Lichte, and Simon Simpkin. "Kenya Agricultural Risk Assessment World Bank Report," *World Bank*, November 2015, <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/294711467992513646/pdf/97887-REVISED-WP-P148139-PUBLIC-Box393257B-Kenya-Agricultural-Sector-Risk-Assessment.pdf>
 6. "Drought in the Horn of Africa: New analyses flag mounting risks, need to support rural families," *Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations*, February 11, 2022, <https://www.fao.org/newsroom/detail/drought-in-the-horn-of-africa-new-analyses-flag-mounting-risks-need-to-support-rural-families/en>
 7. Vibeke Bjornlund, Henning Bjornlund, and Andre F. Van Rooyen. "Why agricultural production in Sub-Saharan Africa remains low compared to the rest of the world -a historical perspective," *International Journal of Water and Resources Development* Volume 36, May 5, 2020, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/07900627.2020.1739512>
 8. Caroline Delgado, Vongai Murugani, and Kristina Tschunkert, "Food Systems in Conflict and Peacebuilding Settings: Pathways and Interconnections," *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute*, June 2021, https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2021-06/2106_food_systems.pdf
-

Dr. Florence Odiwuor is a lecturer at the School of Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Environmental Studies at Rongo University, Kenya. Her teaching work is centered on sustainable food value chains, food supply chains, food security, post-harvest systems, public-private partnerships, and project planning and management. Her current research work is focused on transforming sorghum-based farming systems through agro-ecological intensification, food and nutrition systems analysis, value-adding technologies across various value chains, and maternal and child health and nutrition with skills in community mobilization, gender in agricultural development, inclusive participatory approaches in community engagement, and socio-economic aspects in program development and implementation. She was a Southern Voices Network for Peacebuilding (SVNP) Scholar during the summer 2022 (May to August) term at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, D.C.



The Africa Program

The Africa Program works to address the most critical issues facing Africa and US-Africa relations, build mutually beneficial US-Africa relations, and enhance knowledge and understanding about Africa in the United States.

The Program achieves its mission through in-depth research and analyses, including our blog Africa Up Close, public discussion, working groups, and briefings that bring together policymakers, practitioners, and subject matter experts to analyze and offer practical options for tackling key challenges in Africa and in US-Africa relations.

The Africa Program focuses on four core issues:

- i. Good governance and leadership
- ii. Conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and security
- iii. Trade, investment, and sustainable development
- iv. Africa's evolving role in the global arena

The Program maintains a cross-cutting focus on the roles of women, youth, and technology, which are critical to Africa's future: to supporting good governance, to securing peace, to mitigating poverty, and to assuring sustainable development.

SVNP Policy Brief and Research Paper Series






For the accompanying Research Paper and the full series of SVNP publications, please visit: <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/southern-voices-network-peacebuilding-publications>








© 2022, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars

Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars
One Woodrow Wilson Plaza
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20004-3027

The Wilson Center

 www.wilsoncenter.org
 wwics@wilsoncenter.org
 facebook.com/woodrowwilsoncenter
 [@thewilsoncenter](https://twitter.com/thewilsoncenter)
 202.691.4000

The Africa Program

 www.wilsoncenter.org/africa
 africa@wilsoncenter.org
 facebook.com/africaprogram
 [@AfricaUpClose](https://twitter.com/AfricaUpClose)
 202.691.4118