

# KENYA:

## Emergency Needs Assessment Report

Kitui, Mwingi, Tharaka North and Tharaka South Counties – Eastern Province

July 2011



### I. Executive Summary

In June 2011, the Government of Kenya (GoK) declared the country's deepening drought to be a national disaster. Some 3.7 million people are currently in need of assistance across the country. Rising food prices, sporadic conflict over resources, limited humanitarian support and interrupted market systems have exacerbated the crisis, eroding livelihoods and crippling traditional coping mechanisms across Kenya.

In Kitui, Mwingi, Tharaka North and Tharaka South Counties<sup>1</sup> of Eastern Province, successive dry seasons have hit the marginal farming population especially hard. Over the past two years, low precipitation has gradually diminished water levels and depleted the land on which livestock graze. The failure of the 2010 and 2011 seasonal rains has virtually halted crop production; already vulnerable, farmers and agro-pastoralists are now

struggling to obtain critical foods and seeds. Meanwhile, the lack of marketable crops, together with the dwindling number of jobs on local farms, has severely constrained access to income-generating opportunities.

As the next harvest is not expected until February 2012, the situation in Eastern Province is expected to deteriorate over the coming months. FEWSNET currently classifies Kitui, Mwingi, Tharaka North and Tharaka South at IPC Level 3 – 'crisis.' However, FEWSNET's August/September estimated food security outcomes projects that without appropriate levels of support, these districts will move into an 'emergency' classification – one step below famine. The next six months therefore offer a crucial window of opportunity to boost resilience, protect livelihoods, and mitigate the impact of acute food insecurity.

<sup>1</sup> Recent redistricting efforts have resulted in divergent nomenclature for administrative divisions in Kitui, Mwingi, and Tharaka. For the purpose of this proposal, the term 'county' refers to the larger administrative area in which CHF proposes to work.

## Summary of assessment findings and recommendations:

1. Focus group participants in all four districts identified food prices as a key factor in household food security. While staple foods are generally available in local markets, they are often beyond the purchasing power of drought-affected farmers. CHF's assessment revealed significant price hikes of staple items over the last six months. The price of water has increased by 50%, the price of cooking oil has increased by approximately 80%, and the price of cereals has increased by more than 75%. At the same time, most households are experiencing sharply reduced cash inflows; many are selling off livestock assets in order to address immediate food requirements.

**Recommendation:** Projects that inject cash into local economies provide immediate relief while also protecting key household assets. Cash-for-Work (CFW) schemes may offer a double dividend if they incorporate drought-mitigation activities such as the construction of water catchments, weirs, and sand dams. Channeling cash through women is advisable, since they are more likely to spend income on household needs.



2. CHF's assessment covered rural areas comprised primarily of agro-pastoralists, many of whom depend on livestock for food, milk and cash. The drought has limited the amount of grass that is available for grazing, placing cattle at particularly high risk of rapid body deterioration. In many instances, people have already sold most of their livestock at significantly reduced prices, thus curtailing household capacity to maintain and protect basic livelihoods.

**Recommendation:** Enable vulnerable households to protect their critical livestock assets through the provision of fodder to bridge the livestock hunger period, which can extend through December. Cattle should be prioritized since their food needs are higher than those of goats.

3. Most people in the assessed districts do not have access to seeds. Since the last harvest failed, farmers are unable to glean seeds for planting or for sale in local markets. Both certified and traditional seeds are available in larger markets, but at a cost that is often prohibitive.

**Recommendation:** Even if CFW projects increase household income, hungry households are unlikely to purchase seeds over food. Providing access to drought-tolerant seeds, enhanced with appropriate training, will support farming households to maximize their harvest in 2012 and increase community resilience to future agricultural shocks.

4. Although Tharaka North and Tharaka South offer more sources of surface water in than in Kitui and Mwingi, all four districts report water shortages that present negative implications for health, agriculture and livelihoods. Many households that previously obtained water for free (from streams, wells, boreholes or other sources) are now compelled to shoulder the additional cost of purchasing water from the market, and travel long distances to access reliable sources of water.

**Recommendation:** Rehabilitating existing boreholes is more efficient and cost effective than constructing new ones. Borehole rehabilitation should be accompanied by the development of Village Water Committees to ensure that water sources are appropriately managed, maintained and repaired. In Tharaka, multiple permanent rivers and micro-irrigation projects can help small farmers capitalize on indigenous resources while also establishing durable systems for the long term. WASH activities can be integrated into CFW projects for greater impact.

5. As the 2011 drought continues to worsen across the country, people from other affected communities – including Balambala, Isiolo, Garissa and Tana River – are migrating to the assessed districts to take advantage of marginally better grazing and marketing conditions. The resulting strain on already-limited resources is spurring conflict, placing an added burden on water points, and increasing the risk of additional livestock deaths due to starvation and disease. The situation is particularly volatile due to a history of poorly adjudicated land rights. Many people lack formal title deeds and are suspicious that new arrivals may try to seize their land.

**Recommendation:** Apply appropriate targeting strategies to ensure that projects provide assistance as needed to both recent arrivals and the host community; that leaders from both communities are consulted and included during the implementation process; and that interventions do not exacerbate existing tensions.



## II. Geographical Context and Current Situation

Kitui, Mwingi, Tharaka North and Tharaka South Counties are home to more than 800,000 people,<sup>2</sup> most of whom are agro-pastoralists. The area is geographically vast, covering a total of 32,000 square kilometers in Eastern Province, and, with the exception of the central capitals, largely rural. All four counties are categorized as marginal mixed farming livelihoods zones.

Surface water sources in Kitui are scarce, consisting primarily of temporary rivers and streams that originate in forested areas during the rainy season. As in neighboring Mwingi, the highlands are more likely to receive rainfall than the lowlands, and economic development is significantly weaker among communities in arid areas. The poverty rate in Mwingi has been estimated at 60%. In divisions with low precipitation levels and uncultivable soil, poverty rates are thought to be even higher.<sup>3</sup>

The presence of nine permanent rivers in Tharaka North and Tharaka South provides these districts with slightly improved access to water. Most communities in Tharaka have traditionally drawn on the tributaries of the Tana River for their household water requirements. However, frequent droughts and widespread soil erosion – much of it related to charcoal burning and overgrazing – have made farming difficult in the district. Like Kitui and Mwingi, Tharaka has a long history of reliance on food aid.

The climate in all four districts is hot and dry for most of the year. Limited infrastructure is in place to support the movement of basic goods in remote areas, and a lack of modern irrigation systems makes it extremely difficult for pastoralists and small farmers to survive any failures in the seasonal rains. Prospects for the newest country in the world are positive, but successfully reintegrating the 250,000, and growing, returnees while minimizing conflict and meeting basic needs is the first of many challenges ahead.

Kitui, Mwingi, Tharaka North and Tharaka South Counties experienced inadequate rainfall during the 2010 short-rains season and almost no rainfall during the 2011 long-rains season, resulting in widespread drought and crop failure. In some areas, the impact of the recent drought has been compounded by up to three previous seasons of failed rains.

Many households are still living off the 2009 harvest. Meanwhile, dire conditions in nearby districts have created a pull-factor for pastoralist communities. In eastern Isiolo, northern Tana River, and northern Garissa, rainfall levels over the past calendar year have been less than 20% of normal.<sup>4</sup> Increased migration levels have intensified the strain on grazing land and water points in Kitui, Tharaka, and Mwingi, setting the stage for ongoing conflict over scarce resources as the 2011 drought continues.

### Seasonal Calendar – Kitui, Mwingi, Tharaka North and Tharaka South Counties

Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July
		short rains					long rains				
long dry spell					short dry spell					long dry spell	
		planting					planting				
harvest						harvesting					harvest

<sup>2</sup> The 1999 census found 515,422 people in Kitui; 303,828 people in Mwingi; and 100,992 in Tharaka North and South. Current estimates vary, but these figures are projected to have risen substantially by 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Ministry of State for Development of Northern Kenya and Other Arid Lands, Arid Lands Resource Management Project II, Kitui District Profile and Mwingi District Profile.

<sup>4</sup> UN-OCHA, 'Kenya Humanitarian Update,' Vol. 72, 1-27 June 2011, p. 4.



### III. Needs Assessment and Sector Response Capacity

CHF conducted a needs assessment in partnership with Africa Harvest in Kitui, Mwingi, Tharaka North and Tharaka South districts from July 23-25, 2011. Two CHF representatives conducted a follow-up mission in Kitui and Mwingi from 28-29 July. Overall, the assessment interviewed 33 key informants, surveyed 6 markets, and facilitated 9 focus group discussions with 187 participants, more than half of whom were women. The fieldwork component was supplemented by a desk review of secondary information collected from the Famine Early Warning Systems Network, the Kenya Food Security Steering Group, the Ministry of State for Development of Northern Kenya and Other Arid Lands, UNOCHA, USAID/OFDA, and WFP, among other sources. Additional key informant interviews were conducted by telephone from Nairobi in order to amplify and verify findings from the field.

### IV. Main Findings

#### Agriculture and food security

The failure of the seasonal rains has drastically limited the food supply in all four assessed counties. In a normal year, key crops include millet, maize, sorghum, cow peas, pigeon peas, beans and green grams. Because of the drought, however, there is almost no food available on household-level subsistence farms. Instead, people are forced to purchase basic commodities in the market, using cash reserves that are rapidly dwindling in the absence of viable income-generating opportunities. In Kitui, the assessment found that in April 2011, 86% of the population was purchasing all of their household food needs in the market. By June, that figure had risen to 90%.

The implications of the drought are wide-ranging. Many focus group participants stated that they are eating only one meal a day. In Tharaka North, one group reported that they are eating seeds in the absence of other available food. An area chief in the same county claimed that children are increasingly dropping out of school because they are too weak to attend class. In Mwingi, young men are increasingly leaving their rural homes in search of work opportunities, with some groups reporting a rise in the number of street children in urban areas. Meanwhile, many families are selling their remaining livestock for cash that can be used in the market. In Kitui, focus group participants reported that an average household owned 10 cows and 60 goats before the drought. Today, that household has lost the more than half of its assets. Losses in Mwingi are even more severe: the typical household owns 3 goats and no cattle, down from an average of 20 goats and 10 cattle three years ago.

County	Average Plot Size	Average Household size
Kitui	5 acres	6-8 people
Mwingi	2.5 acres	6-8 people
Tharaka North	12 acres	8 people
Tharaka South	12 acres	8 people

Focus group participants in all four counties identified food prices as one of their top concerns. In general, food and other goods are available in local and district-level markets, but are too expensive for drought-affected farmers. Vendors consistently stated that there are fewer customers today than there were before the drought. However, vendors cannot afford to stimulate demand by reducing prices, since they themselves are purchasing commodities at inflated prices from suppliers, choosing



Food Item	Kitui	Mwingi	Tharaka North	Tharaka South
<b>Cabbage</b>				
<i>Pre-drought</i>	30/ea	30/ea		
<i>Drought</i>	35/ ea	50/ea		
<b>Maize</b>				
<i>Pre-drought</i>	30/kg	100/kg	25/kg	50/kg
<i>Drought</i>	50/kg	175/kg	50/kg	75/kg
<b>Potato</b>				
<i>Pre-drought</i>	10/8 pieces	10/4 pieces		
<i>Drought</i>	20/4 pieces	20/4 pieces		
<b>Sugar</b>				
<i>Pre-drought</i>			100/kg	90/bag
<i>Drought</i>			150/kg	140/bag
<b>Beans</b>				
<i>Pre-drought</i>	60/kg	70/kg	30/kg	25/kg
<i>Drought</i>	65/kg	100/kg	80/kg	75/kg
<b>Water</b>				
<i>Pre-drought</i>	2/20 litres	4/20 litres	5/20 litres	
<i>Drought</i>	2/20 litred	6/20 litres	20/20 litres	
<b>Coolking oil</b>				
<i>Pre-drought</i>	100/kg	120/litre	160/litre	115/kg
<i>Drought</i>	180/kg	240/litre	230/litre	160/kg

instead to package food into smaller, more affordable bundles. The problem is exacerbated by sharp increases in fuel prices. In early 2011, a liter of petrol cost 90 Ksh; today, at a time when vendors are forced to travel much longer distances, it costs 120 Ksh. Bus fares between major markets and local villages have risen by as much as 40-60%.

Livestock are the one exception to overall price inflation in the assessed area. As the health of animals has declined, so has their value. In Tharaka North, goats now cost an average of 1,200 Ksh, down from 5,000 Ksh six months ago; in Kitui, cattle that previously cost 15,000 Ksh are now sold for half that price. The rapid deflation in prices is particularly problematic in light of the fact that many households, lacking bank accounts, effectively keep their savings in livestock.

The drought has been particularly severe for cattle, which require large amounts of fodder to stay alive. The assessment team noted that goats in the area appeared relatively healthy and that cows were more likely to be visibly malnourished, an observation that has been echoed in the monthly drought bulletins from the Ministry of State for Development of Northern Kenya and Other Arid Lands. Numerous informants claimed that cows are dying from starvation on a daily basis and that no relief projects had focused on the provision of fodder. In focus group discussions, participants suggested that goats had added value during a drought because they require less nourishment and are easier to sell quickly. Nearly all interview subjects reported grazing livestock rather than purchasing fodder, identifying hay as the most appropriate option for commercial feed.

The next rainy season is expected to commence, at the earliest, in October 2011, meaning that the best-case scenario is a harvest in February/March 2012. Given the current state of food insecurity in the assessed area, it is difficult to imagine how families will survive for another six months. In



fact, it may take much longer to recover from the impact of the drought. Farmers in all four counties reported almost no access to the seeds they will need to begin planting in October. Some communities traditionally “recycle” seeds from their crops; however this year, the failure of the harvest has made that process impossible. In other communities, certified seeds are purchased at medium to large-sized markets. But without the sale of crops to provide a steady cash flow, farmers lack the purchasing power necessary to acquire commercial seeds. As many farmers concentrate their planting during the short-rain season, it will be especially critical to ensure that seeds are distributed well in advance of October.

### Economic recovery and market systems

The assessment found that many farming households traditionally rely on the sale of surplus crops – generally around one-quarter to one-half of the total harvest – at local markets. The 2011 drought has thus deprived marginal farmers of a key source of income as well as basic food supplies. It has also limited their options for paid employment, which normally accounts for a greater proportion of household income than any other activity. In Kitui, 36% of district residents cite casual labor as their principal source of household income. In Mwingi, the figure is 44%, and in Tharaka, 41%.<sup>5</sup> Typically, jobs for men entail working on local farms, while women are more likely to be employed as cleaners or to carry firewood. In Kitui and Mwingi, the average daily wage is between 150-150 Ksh in rural areas and 250-350 Ksh in urban areas. Rates are slightly higher in Tharaka North and Tharaka South, at 200-250 Ksh in rural areas and 300-350 Ksh in urban areas. However, the drought has nearly eradicated farm-related jobs in all four counties, and the increased demand for paid employment has made it much more difficult to find work at local businesses.

In the absence of alternative income-generating opportunities, some households are turning to other measures to maintain a minimal subsistence threshold through the coming months. Livestock are often sold as a last resort. Although it is illegal, charcoal-burning is common in Kitui and Mwingi. In Tharaka, women use wild papyrus to make mats, brooms, and baskets, selling them in the market for 50 to 100 Ksh. While men generally control money earned from the sale of livestock, a woman is more likely to manage her own income if she is perceived to have ‘created’ the item she is selling. Women are also more likely to participate in the numerous community self-help groups that have been formed in the region. These focus on different themes – seed purchases, goats, school fees, repairs to members’ homes – but are characterized by a clear organizational structure, including access to a bank account and registration at the district-level Social Development Office. Many self-help groups have been unable to mobilize for

<sup>5</sup> Ministry of State for Development of Northern Kenya and Other Arid Lands, Arid Lands Resource Management Project II, Kitui, Mwingi and Tharaka District Profiles.



drought-response activities because of low funds and capacity. However, the group model offers a potential structure for development agencies to build upon, especially for quick-impact projects that will benefit from minimal start-up time.

The drought has been particularly painful for small vendors who are forced to travel long distances to procure goods for sale. In general, the supply chain in the assessed area devolves outward from major markets located in the County headquarters or in neighboring areas. In Tharaka North, many vendors travel all the way to Meru town to procure goods for resale – a journey that can entail a semiweekly bus journey of over 60 km, one-way. In Mwingi, vendors often travel 20 km to Tana River, where there is an irrigation project. In Kitui, there are reports of food coming from as far as Tanzania.

Large-scale markets supply medium-sized vendors who, in turn, supply the smallest vendors. If they perceive high demand for particular products, large vendors will often travel to smaller markets in order to facilitate sales, saving rural vendors valuable time and transportation money. However, the smallest vendors do not benefit from the service, as they cannot afford to buy goods in sufficiently large quantities to justify the suppliers' trip. At smaller markets, vendors travel between 10 and 30 km – often on foot – to purchase goods from middlemen. They then set their prices according to the initial cost of the purchase, the cost of transportation, and a small markup.

#### Water, sanitation & hygiene (WASH)

Each of the four assessed counties is facing severe water shortages and a lack of critical infrastructure, including water catchment structures, weirs and sand dams. However, the distinctive topography in each county has led to a number of different challenges and opportunities.

#### Kitui

While some surface water is available from seasonal rivers, communities in Kitui depend primarily on boreholes, rock catchments, sand dams, and piped water from the Masinga dam to survive through the dry season. Many people walk more than 10 km to a water source. The assessment found that rivers and streams are currently dry; recharge levels are extremely low, at less than 20%; and rationing is now getting underway at water points. At one borehole visited by the assessment team, people had walked over six hours and slept on-site, waiting more than 12 hours to obtain water.

Kitui is on a rock formation, making it difficult to dig boreholes and wells. Shallow wells are often located in dry stream beds where they are easily contaminated by livestock. The salinity level in borehole water is very high, and many diesel-pumped boreholes are

in need of repairs, including the replacement of oil and air filters. The failure of the rains has prevented sand dams from recharging; among the 10 earth dams in the district, 75% are currently dry. Since the onset of the drought, many households have started to purchase water at 2 to 3 Ksh per 20-litre jerrycan. The government is planning to start water trucking, but the exact locations have not yet been released.

### Mwingi

Communities in Mwingi traditionally access water from seasonal streams. Because many of these streams have now dried up, people are traveling further afield to find water, sometimes walking for more than four hours. As in Kitui, residents have sited hand-dug wells in stream beds in order to take advantage of the high water table, risking contamination by livestock. Focus group participants and government officials both noted concern over the high salinity level in borehole water and the number of boreholes that require spare parts and other repairs. Water is being sold at an average price of 2 shillings per 20-litre jerry can.

### Tharaka North and Tharaka South

As they have done in past years, most people in Tharaka continue to depend on tributaries of the Tana River for their water supply. The distance to the nearest water source is usually less than 1-2 km, but because the rivers are accessed for all purposes – washing, drinking, and watering livestock – the water is becoming increasingly polluted and unsafe for human consumption. Many focus group participants in Tharaka identified a need for micro-irrigation schemes that will ultimately enable them to take better advantage of local rivers.

Other than rivers, boreholes are the major source of water in Tharaka. There are 110 boreholes in Tharaka North and 257 boreholes in Tharaka South. Many of these are now dry or suffer from excessive salinity. The Water Office in Marimanti, estimates that a total of 100 boreholes require rehabilitation. The most common complaint is broken parts: spares have to be procured from Nairobi, and funding is inadequate for this purpose. The parts that are most likely to break are the o-ring, bush bearing, hanger pin, foot valve, pump cylinder, rod centralizer, and fulcrum pin. The static water table is, on average, 50 meters.

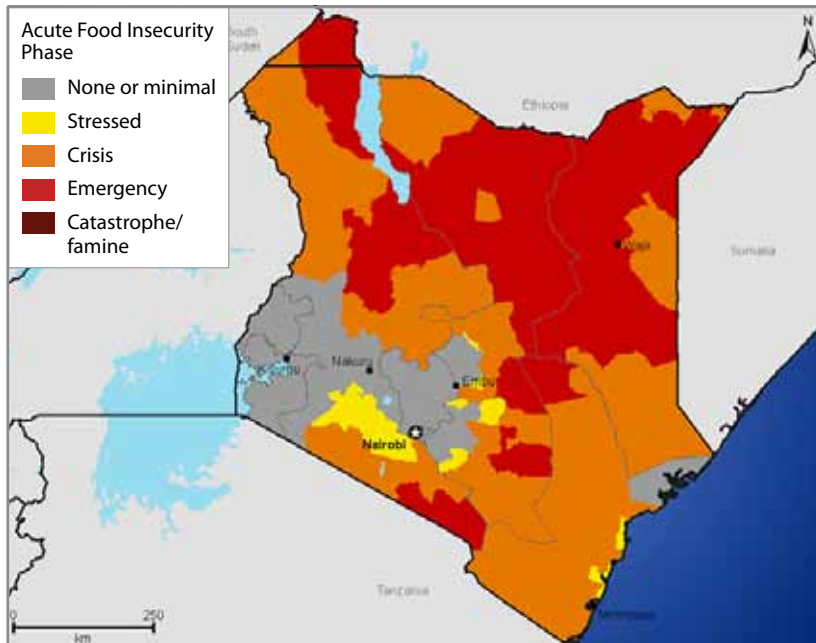
A major problem with boreholes in Tharaka is the lack of community engagement. To be sustainable, borehole rehabilitation must be accompanied by the development of water committees that encourage community ownership and empower local populations to take responsibility for basic repairs. Trainings to date appear to have been minimal and ineffective. The Deputy District Water Officer stated that the office is able to implement trainings, but it is also open to partnering with NGOs.

## V. Coordination Structures & Development Partners

The District Steering Group (DSG) is spearheading the district-level drought response and includes representatives from technical line ministries as well as development partners. The DSG reports to the Kenya Food Security Steering Group (KFSSG) in Nairobi. It is chaired by district government and involves the Arid Lands Resource Management Project, based in the district offices.

Active development partners in the assessed districts include ActionAid, AMREF, the Anglican Church of Kenya, the Catholic Dioceses of Kitui, Mwingi, and Meru, FAO, Farm Africa, German Agro Action, GTZ, the Methodist Church of Kenya, Plan International, WFP and World Vision. The GoK is providing limited quantities of seeds and emergency rations and supports a livestock off-take program that has offered some relief to pastoralists. WFP projects have a particularly extensive scope, reaching 135,900 beneficiaries in Kitui, 61,480 beneficiaries in Mwingi, and 31,030 beneficiaries in Tharaka to date with Food-for-Work/Assets interventions. However, the assessment found that the need for assistance in the assessed districts is far greater than agencies are currently able to accommodate under existing drought response plans.

## Estimated Food Security Outcomes – August - September 2011



Source: FEWSNET