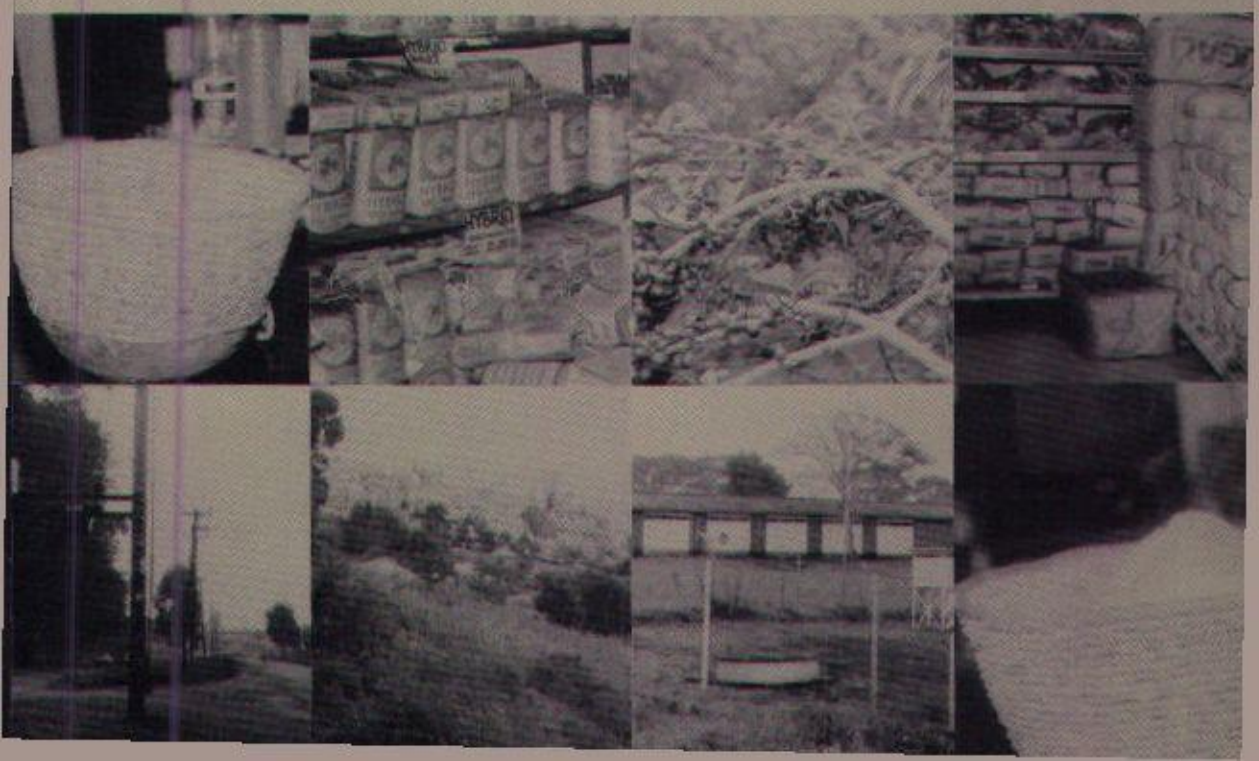
RE-CONCEPTUALISING FOOD SECURITY

Interlocking Strategies, Unfolding Choices and Rural Livelihoods in Kisii District, Kenya

Mary Omosa



STELLINGEN

1. One person's coping strategy is another's livelihood (*Susanna Davies 1993, p.67*).

2. The search for food security cannot be observed outside the social processes within which it takes form.

3. Food security ranges from holding physical stocks to the mere fact that some household members are assumed to have the capacity to render assistance when such need arises.

4. Some of the dilemmas facing the food policies of national governments have to do with how much government can delegate without abdicating primary responsibilities.

5. Food: a tool to entice some and a weapon to repulse others.

6. Many of the common beliefs about African women's role in food production (e.g. that African agriculture can be neatly divided into a female/subsistence sector and a male/commercial sector) are myths (*Ann Whitehead 1990, p.14*).

7. Planning takes a bit of imagination and plenty of dreaming. Yet, only a few of these plans see the light of day.

8. Part of the delay in finding answers to the food security problem has been brought about by a limited understanding and considerable *mis*understanding of what constitutes adequate food. Micro-based studies provide great insights.

9. News from around the World: same issues, a variety of labels and interpretations?

10. No matter the time-span, staying in a place is different from living there.

11. 'By necessities I understand not only the commodities which are indispensably necessary for the support of life, but what ever the custom of the country renders it indecent to be without' (*Adam Smith, 1776*).

12. When I do not feel like working, I take a walk. When I feel like working, I lie down until the feeling goes away (*anonymous scholar*).

Propositions for the Thesis:
Re-Conceptualising Food Security: Interlocking Strategies, Unfolding Choices and Rural Livelihoods in Kisii District, Kenya.
Mary Omosa
Wageningen, October 26, 1998

RE-CONCEPTUALISING FOOD SECURITY

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RE-CONCEPTUALISING FOOD SECURITY

Interlocking Strategies, Unfolding Choices and Rural Livelihoods
in Kisii District, Kenya

Mary Omosa

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to
Orina & Biko
each in his own way

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Exchange rates (Kshs to one US$)

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1994	Kshs. 49
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In June 1994, I received a scholarship award with a mixture of joy and anxiety. I was delighted at a dream come true but I was also concerned about having to leave my family behind. In October, I finally arrived in Wageningen to prepare for research on a subject that had preoccupied me for several years. Food security has interested me since 1986 when, in the middle of a study on woodfuel, I realised that in as much as households were struggling to obtain adequate supplies of cooking fuel, the food to be cooked was also not readily obtainable. Some people went hungry in spite of their efforts and, in general, the availability of food on the market and related policy measures did not serve to assuage these fears. In this endeavour to understand how food security comes about and for whom in particular, I have received support from many individuals and institutions. I am pleased to thank them.

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Mary Omosa
August, 1998

CHAPTER 1

THE SEARCH FOR FOOD SECURITY

This study stems from a practical observation that a high potential rural setting, and one that was once food abundant, is now characterised by regular hunger. In Kisii District, a relatively well-endowed agricultural region, it is not uncommon to find households going hungry not long after the harvest period. The Kenyan government's assumption, that once policies to deal with this are adopted they will necessarily translate into food security at the rural household level, has become elusive. The Gusii, a group of people who were once relatively adept to accommodating to new situations and challenges, seem no longer able to meet this basic need of food security. Currently, households resort to buying food on the market soon after harvest but they are not always able to buy enough. And when they fall back on social networks these can provide them no more than a few tins of grain. The question therefore is, how has such a situation developed?

As explored in Chapter 2, three lines of interpretation dominate the debate on how hunger comes about. Modernisation theories argue that food insecurity results from a lack of sufficient supplies among the food needy, a condition that they attribute to the existence of structures that do not facilitate the necessary balance between supply and demand. Proponents of this school recommend, among other things, the commercialisation of the factors of production and, in particular, putting the 'right' policies in place.[1] Another argument is the view that food insecurity derives from the inability to utilise an existing potential to produce adequate food, and that this can be attributed to a lack of bargaining power deriving from the establishment of commodity relations themselves. A third position is the argument that food insecurity results from a failure in entitlements, that is, the right to obtain sufficient amounts of the food that is available. Largely emanating from the work of Amartya Sen, this approach argues that people go hungry because of a breakdown in the relations governing their access to food, following a shift in exchange mappings or a loss of possessions.

But these perspectives do not unravel the discrepancies that continue to characterise food patterns at the rural household level and, in particular, that for some, attaining food security remains a distant hope. In other words, the existing literature does not fully account for what governs the search for adequate food, and especially the fact that only some succeed while others fail to obtain required supplies. In an attempt to address these concerns, the empirical chapters in this thesis argue that, in everyday life, the search for food security is far more complex than the question of an imbalance in supply versus demand, or a collapse in entitlement relations. Instead, at the rural household level, the search for adequate food is a function of how the individuals concerned conceptualise and actualise their

livelihoods. Therefore, food security comprises more than availability, access and stability of supplies.

In this thesis, the search for adequate food is perceived as a social process. The above dilemma is therefore positioned in relation to the changes that have taken place among the Gusii. Thus, I focus on the interplay between historical processes, state intervention and household practices. I argue that household food security is an outcome of a network of relations, and these are a function of the historical, social, economic, political, technical and cultural transformations that have characterised rural livelihoods over time, processes that are nevertheless mediated by people's conceptualisations of their life chances. I therefore look at how people visualize their food needs and, in particular, how they interact with the processes taking place within and beyond their households, and the diverse ways in which they interpret these experiences. The aim, then, is to understand how food security is *gained* by some and *lost* by others.

The social dimensions of food security: theoretical and conceptual issues

This study goes beyond a categorisation that reduces the search for adequate food to a question of success or failure, and instead, brings out the complexities that surround this search. Using an actor-oriented analysis, I show how households experience the search for adequate food, how they actually organise resources at hand with the aim of meeting food needs, how they manipulate and thereby create space for themselves (in an attempt to resolve problems), how they define their world (what matters, when and how), and how this in turn comes to form part of their opportunities and challenges.[2]

The actor-oriented approach as advanced by Norman Long argues that, even when conditions may appear relatively homogenous, there are differential responses to similar structural circumstances. These differential patterns arise, in part, as a creation of the actors themselves. As such, Long argues, people are not simply disembodied social categories or passive recipients of intervention. They are, instead, active participants who process information and strategise in their dealings with various local actors as well as with outside institutions and personnel. Hence, the different patterns of social organisation that emerge result from the interactions, negotiations and social struggles that take place between several kinds of actors (Long 1992, p.21). Consequently, Long underscores the central role of human agency. He argues that the notion of agency is significant because it attributes to the individual actor, the capacity to process social experience and to devise ways of coping with life, even under the most extreme forms of coercion.[3]

In this thesis, I argue that households experience the search for food in different ways and, while some may succeed and others fail, each has the capability to devise ways of coping with their food needs (however hopeless), and how they choose to

go about this results from a social process. Hence, whereas Sen (1981, p.2) has argued that food security results from entitlements and a subsequent ability to command existing sources of food, we still need to understand how these entitlements come about, how command is mobilised successfully but only for some, and whether in fact we can talk about success and failure in absolute terms. Thus, by giving the analysis a non-linear and a non-deterministic interpretation, this study elucidates the complex meanderings so real to everyday life, and thereby explains how people diversely work towards a 'common' goal and vice versa, and how it is possible that those similarly endowed reap variedly (Long 1997a, p.2). Thus the food security position of households is analysed in terms of processes rather than on the basis of structural determinants, dominant power formations and ideological (ir)rationalities.[4] This study then looks into the practices that households engage in and more importantly, the precise ways in which these households conduct their search for food, relative to their larger livelihoods. The aim is to bring out the heterogenous interplay of factors and, in particular, how people conceptualise and thereafter actualise their search for adequate food. An actor-oriented approach therefore

> 'provides a thorough means of getting to grips with the complexities involved in the battleground of everyday life, both in the field and in the corridors of power and decision-making. That is, it affords an understanding of the interlocking nature of social actions propelled by divergent social interests, representations and consciousness. It also makes it possible to identify the space for change or room for manoeuvre' (Long 1992, p.272).

Within the actor-oriented approach also lies the potential to account for the 'contradictions' that characterise the practices of rural households. This is gained by contextualising social behaviour. I therefore look at how people process information, how they strategise their involvement, and the interplay in these practices. Although heterogeneity is centrally placed, there is however also a recognition that practices interlock. That is, in as much as households pursue a diversity of (food security) strategies, these can still be located within a shared frame of reference.[5] This however points towards more than one direction. First, it is possible that households that seek to obtain their food through cultivation do so for very different reasons (a caution to policies that recommend uniform solutions). But this could also point to the possibility that even when the agenda is similar (in this case obtaining food), people interpret and thereafter actualise this goal diversely.[6] We therefore need to bring out the subtle (and often multiple) realities as understood by those who live and experience them, and also reveal the 'backstage actors' (often invisible to the structural-oriented observer but) who have a decisive influence on people's day-to-day practices.[7]

This study therefore postulates that the search for food is couched in a network of commodity and non-commodity relations, but choices therein vary with how food needs are conceptualised, and the possibilities that are available to individual households. Hence, the notion of social dimensions of food security is here used to refer to the larger framework within which households position their food needs. The central argument is that food security comprises more than balancing supply with demand, or the entitlement relations governing possession and use.

In seeking a deeper meaning for adequate food at the rural household level, this study has employed the actor-oriented perspective as a theoretical as well as a methodological approach (Long 1992, p.271; 1997a, p.3). The analytical framework that I therefore adopt is a combination of both qualitative and quantitative techniques.[8]

Study technique and methodology

This study was undertaken in Kitutu Chache, Kisii District - Kenya. Given the theoretical underpinnings of the study, I started off by seeking an overall picture of the food situation in Kenya, and Kisii District in particular. I made use of secondary sources, mainly government policy documents and records existing in the National Archives. These sources provided the necessary background information in terms of what has taken place over time. The emerging scenario was one of a country that seeks to realise its food needs through self-sufficiency and a District that is relatively well-endowed to make this contribution.

Within Kisii, secondary sources revealed that while the District has a potential to achieve food security (through cultivation or purchases), it is faced with several challenges, including regular food shortages. In seeking to understand how this may have come about, I looked at the country's food policy vis-à-vis what was going on in Kisii. This could not, however, give as complete a picture as was necessary to understand the District's food position. I therefore positioned this dilemma in relation to the changes that have taken place over the years. With the use of two case histories and materials from national and district records, I was able to situate the research question within a wider spectrum. This, however, only raised even more discrepancies, among them, that some households managed to succeed while others failed in their search for adequate food, sometimes under similar conditions. I decided to narrow down the search for answers to individual households in Kitutu Chache, Kisii District.[9] I conducted a survey on 240 households, eight of whom I then took up for in-depth study, lasting for a total of 18 months.[10] In order to supplement and therefore enrich discussions, I also undertook a year-round observation of the agricultural activities in the area. These observations focused on what people did, how they did it, when and who actually undertook what tasks.

Table 1.1 Population distribution by administrative boundaries, Kitutu Chache[11]

region	number of persons	number of households	area sq.km	density per sq. km
Kisii District[12]	1,137,054	198,600	1,351	517
Kitutu Chache	135,084	24,238	226	589
Marani Location	32,663	5,741	54	605
Kegogi Location	24,410	4,350	37	660
Ngenyi Location	17,686	2,944	30	590
Chache Location	26,950	4,773	40	674
Nyakoe Location	33,375	6,430	65	513

Source: Republic of Kenya, National Population Census 1989

In-depth case studies form the basis of much of this thesis, together with data derived from the survey which provides an overall picture and illustrates the distribution patterns of some of the issues that I consider central to the study.[13] Answers to the research questions are also located in discussions on how policy perceives the search for food and the changes that have taken place in Kisii through time.[14]

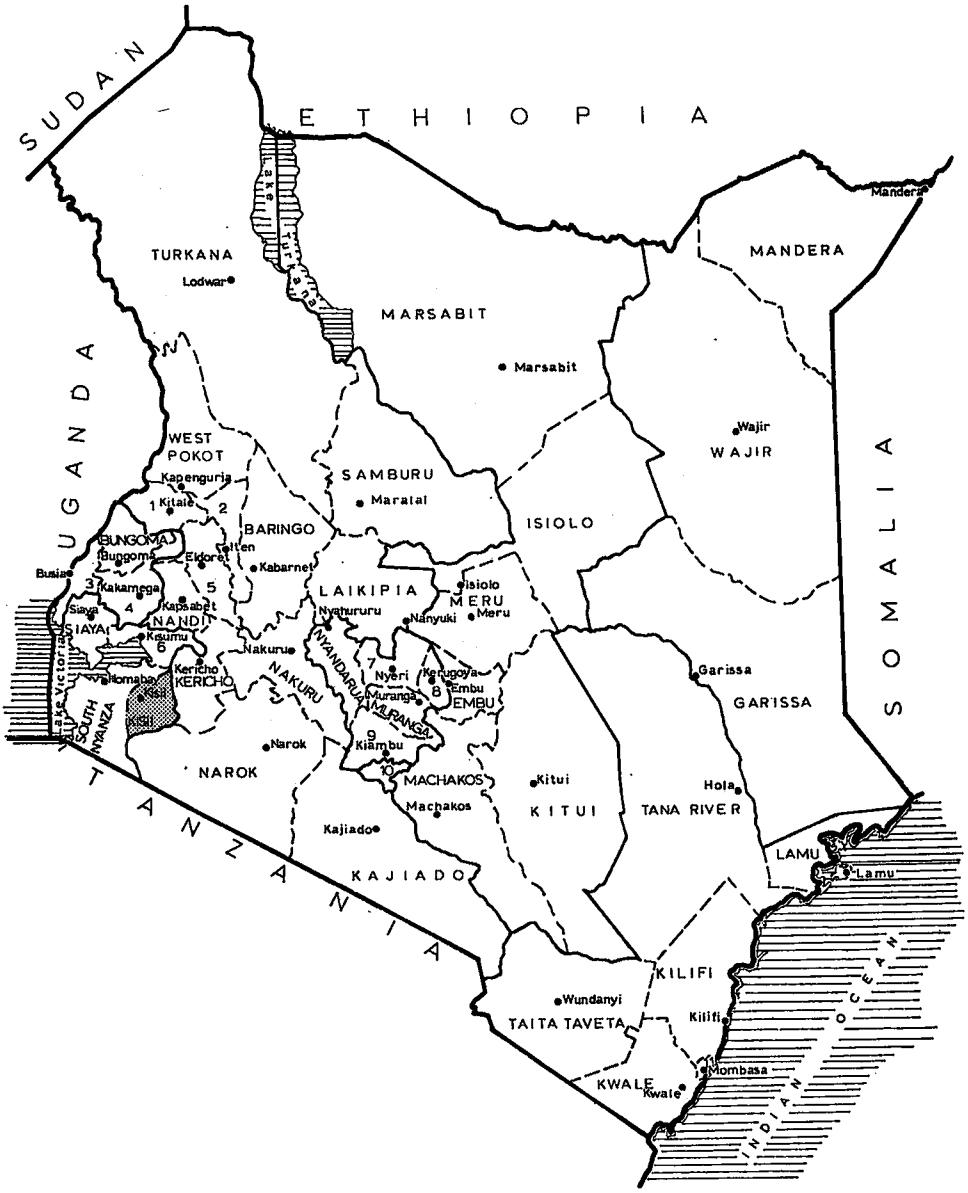
The rest of this introductory chapter is intended to give an overview picture of Kisii District. The aim is to bring out some of the possibilities that households in Kisii are assumed to be faced with as they work towards meeting their food needs. I conclude the chapter with a critique of some of the assumptions underlying these possibilities and I end with a presentation of a general outline of the thesis.

Gusiiland

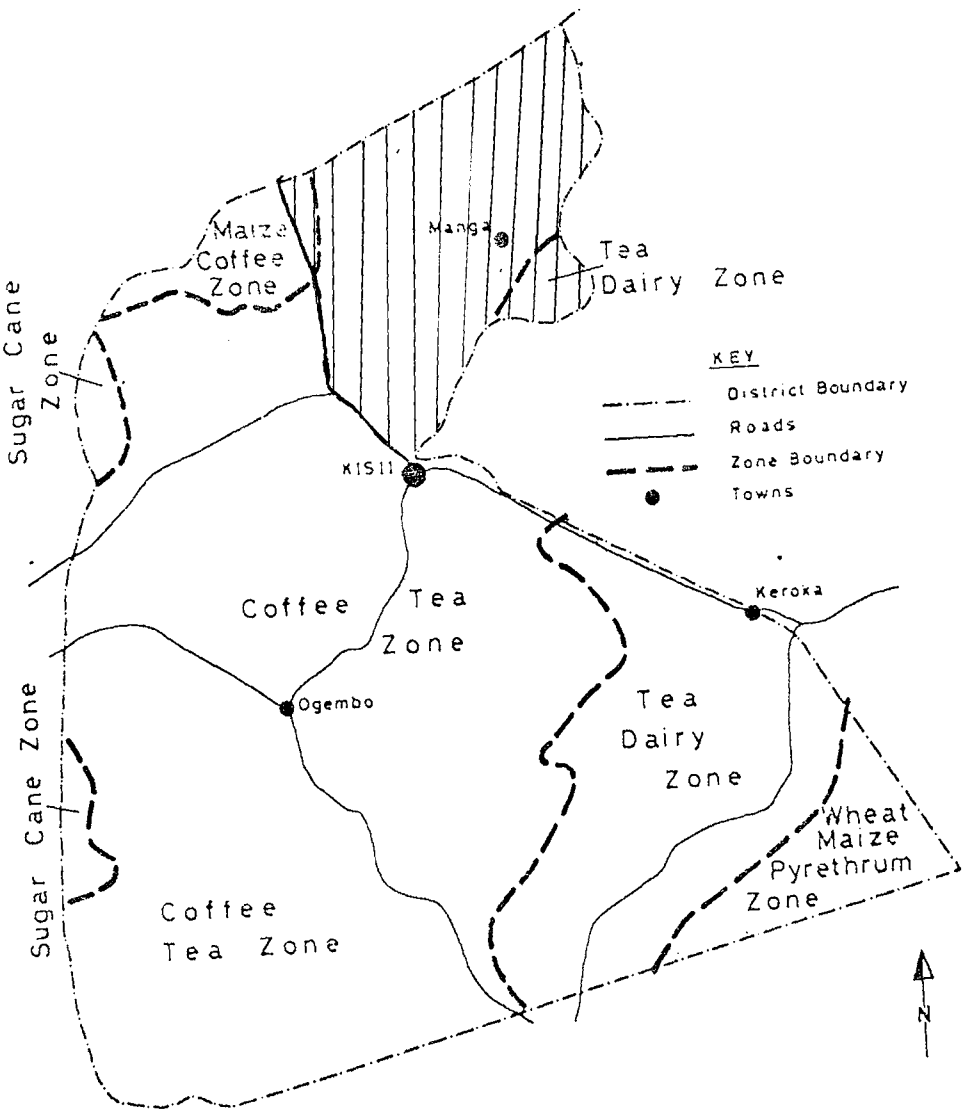
Kisii District, one of the eight Districts of Nyanza Province is the indigenous home of the Gusii. The District is located in the highland area of south western Kenya. It borders Nyamira District to the North and to the East, Narok District to the South, and Homa Bay, Migori and Kuria Districts to the West (Map 1.1). The District covers about 1,351 square kilometres of land, 77 percent of which is suitable for agricultural production (Kenya, District Dev. Plan 1989-93).

The Gusii are a bantu-speaking people. Historical accounts suggest that the Gusii moved and settled in the current region about two centuries ago. They are reported to have originated in a place called *Misiri*, an area whose location seems to have been just North of Mt. Elgon, on the current Kenya-Uganda border.

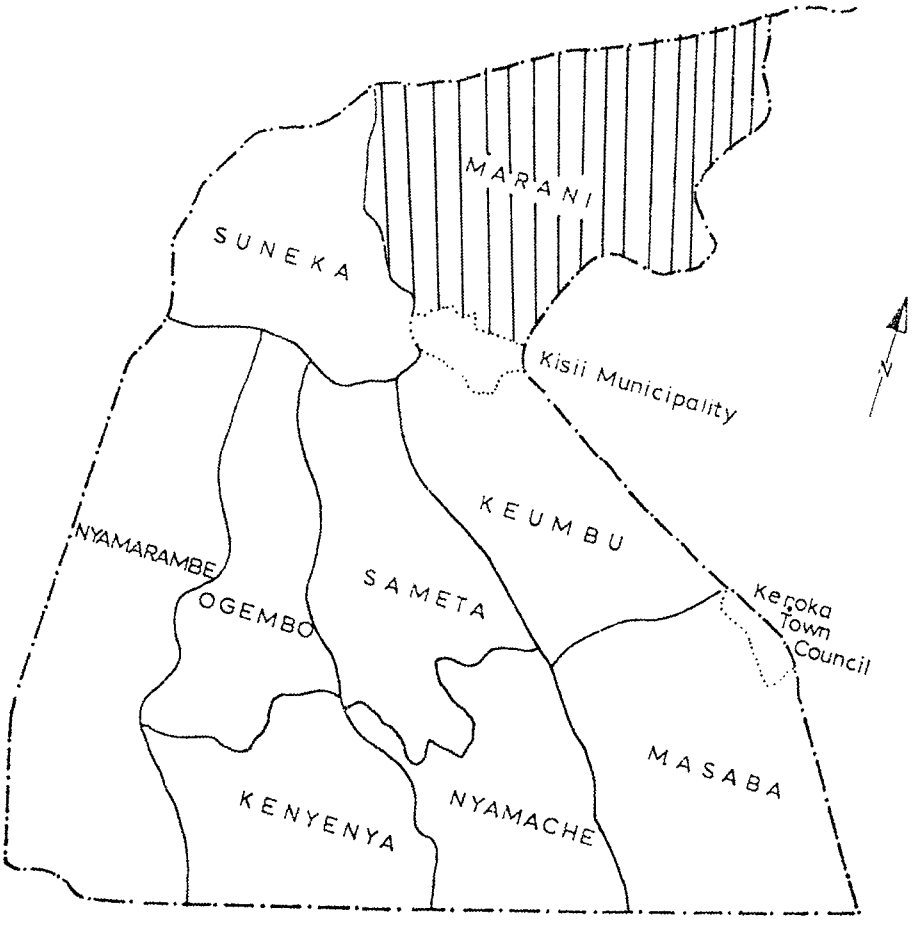
Map 1.1 Map of Kenya and the location of Kisii District



Map 1.2 Kisii District agro-ecological zones



Map 1.3 Kisii District administrative boundaries



En route, the Gusii settled in present day Kisumu and Kano before being forced, mainly by famine and tribal warfare, to move on, initially to Kabianga in Kericho District before retreating to their current location in the present Kisii, Nyamira and Gucha Districts (Kenya, District Socio-Cultural Profiles 1986, p.12-17; Field Interviews, 1995-97).

Topography

Kisii District is mostly hilly and has several ridges in the East. The District can be divided into three zones. The first zone covers areas lying below 1500 metres above sea level, located to the western boundary including southern and western parts of Kitutu Chache. The second zone covers areas lying between 1500-1800 metres above sea level, also to the western parts of the District, including the eastern parts of Kitutu Chache. The third zone covers areas lying more than 1800 metres above sea level and it covers, among others, the northern parts of Kitutu Chache (Kenya, District Dev. Plan 1994-96).

The District is dissected by many permanent rivers which flow westward into Lake Victoria. It lies on a geological base comprising Bukoban, Granitic, Nyanzian and Kavirondo rocks. The Bukoban type is the youngest and the most dominant. A large part of the District is covered with dark red friable clays over the Bukoban rocks. These soils are deep and rich in organic matter. A sizeable area is covered with red-to-brown friable clays with black clays in the plains. These soils have a lateritic horizon and medium organic matter content. Black cotton soil abounds in the alluvial plains. The rest of the District is covered with outcrops of rock and other soils which have been subjected to geological and recent accelerated erosion, making them lose their original characteristics (Kenya, District Dev. Plan 1979-83).

Kisii has a highland equatorial climate. It receives rainfall almost throughout the year. There are, however, two main rain seasons. The long rains begin at the end of March and last until May, while short rains start in October and end in November. An average of about 1500 millimetres of rainfall is received. The mean annual minimum temperatures range between 10^0c and 18^0c and the mean annual maximum temperatures range from 22^0c to 30^0c. The high and reliable rainfall and good temperatures support crops such as tea, coffee, pyrethrum, maize, beans, finger millet and sweet potatoes (Kenya, District Dev. Plan 1989-93; 1994-96).

Demographic profile

Kisii District has a total population of 1,137,054 persons, comprising 198,600 households with a density of 517 persons per square kilometre (Republic of Kenya, National Population Census 1989). According to the 1989 Census, over 65 percent of

the population is under 19 years of age with a greater majority of them in this cohort falling under nine years. Further analysis shows that over one quarter (27%) of the population has no formal education compared to only 0.2 percent with post-secondary education. A sizeable proportion (59%) have primary level education and 13 percent have secondary school education.

The high population growth rates are partly accounted for by high fertility. In 1969, the District had a fertility rate of 7.3 children per woman at age 50 years, far exceeding the national average of 6.6 children per woman. The 1979 Census revealed an even higher rate of 8.7 births per woman. This has, however, declined to an average of eight births per woman (Kenya, National Population Census 1989). Maximum fertility is observed among females aged between 25 and 29 years with the cohorts aged 15-34 years accounting for 74 percent of total fertility. Like other parts of the country, Kisii District experiences several forms of migration: rural to rural, rural to urban, urban to urban, and urban to rural. On average, more men migrate than women (Kenya, National Population Census 1989).

Settlement patterns and social organisation

Topographical maps reveal an uneven population distribution due to the undulating nature of the landscape. Settlement is confined to the slopes and river valleys, while rocky mountain tops and extensive swampy areas are avoided (Kenya, District Dev. Plans: 1984-88; 1989-93; 1994-96).

Although this is changing rather rapidly, settlement patterns in much of rural Gusii are tied to clan and lineage and each Gusii person (*omogusii*) traces descent to Mogusii, through one of the seven clans (Uchendu & Anthony 1975; Ochieng 1971; Field Interviews 1995-97). Descent is traced along the male line and residence is patrilocal. Social relations within the lineage are particularly important because, as a source of solidarity and support, they remain a basis for new forms of networking and support regardless of the changes taking place.

Among the Gusii, a lineage is conceptualised as *egesaku* (common descent) or *enyomba* (family). In the past, membership in a lineage entitled one to rights over land, defence and other forms of support, including meeting food needs (Chapter 4). Migrations among the Gusii, however, show that whereas spatial distribution of lineages is an old practice, and although the people have tried to maintain these linkages to date, particularly by disapproving of inter-marriages, most of the relations have become rather loose in areas that require tangible support. What then seems to matter is a combination of both physical and kinship ties. *Enyomba,* therefore, has come to signify both residential and kin relations with several of these making a clan. A homestead then refers to several households within the same compound but which run as independent units, even if to a limited degree. These units often consist of married sons who still live in the same compound as their

parents and other adult brothers. The Gusii lineage system can therefore be analysed in terms of existing bonds and its physical properties. In this study, I take interest in the Gusii's social organisation because it has an influence on the acquisition and distribution of primary resources, mainly land and labour.

Maize production

Agriculture is the mainstay of Kenya's economy. This sector is expected to provide, among other things, employment, farm incomes, and sufficient food supplies for individual households and the country at large (Kenya, SP No.1 1986, p.62). In Kisii, mixed farming is widely practised and crop production is largely based on multi-cropping. There are 198,600 land holdings and about 112,000 of these are small-scale farms, with sizes ranging between 0.5 and 4.5 acres.[15] Maize is the staple food crop and it is widely cultivated, mainly twice a year.[16] The rest of this discussion will therefore dwell on maize output. Later on in Chapter 4, I will look at how maize came to replace finger millet (and sorghum) as staple food among the Gusii.

Cropping calendar

There are two main agro-ecological zones in Kisii District, the upper midlands (UM) and the lower highlands (LH). According to the Department of Agriculture in Kisii, in the upper midlands where this study was conducted, land preparation for the long rains maize crop is expected to take place between December and February. Planting sets in from February through March and weeding and top dressing are under-way between March and June. Harvesting starts in July through August. During the short rains, land preparation begins in July-August and planting takes place in August. Weeding and top dressing are expected between September and October and harvesting begins in the month of December through January. Farmers are advised to take up line planting, proper spacing and acceptable inter-cropping.

Proper spacing involves planting one maize seed per hole at 75 by 25 centimetres and two seeds per hole at 75 by 50 centimetres. If inter-cropped with beans (only), it is recommended that the beans are planted 10-15 centimetres from plant to plant in between maize rows. The depth of each planting is put at four times the diameter of the seed. The first weeding is supposed to be undertaken about three weeks from the time seeds emerge. When the maize is about two feet high (knee high), top dressing is recommended and if mono-cropped, farmers are expected to apply chemical dust to control pests. The second weeding is optional but it is recommended if weeds are visible. This should take place when the crop is flowering, a time when the maize plant is about to form grain. Therefore, although optional, the second weeding is important as it is intended to remove undue competition for nutrients and water.

Harvesting is expected at physiological maturity, that is when a black layer forms where the cob attaches to the maize stalk. At this point, maize output per hectare for Kisii is technically pegged at 45 bags (~ 18 bags an acre), each weighing about 90 kilogrammes.

Farmers are also expected to apply 150 kilogrammes of Triple Super Phosphate, DAP or Ammonium Phosphate, and 187-200 kilogrammes per hectare of Calcium Ammonium Nitrate (CAN) or UREA as top dressing, in addition to using proper HYV seed at a rate of 25 kilogrammes per hectare (Ministry of Agriculture, Kisii).[17] In order to undertake all the above, it is estimated that one hectare of maize will require 330 working days, spread over a period of eight months in a year to the exclusion of January, June, July and December.[18] In the calendar of events, land preparation is the most demanding, requiring a total of 120 of the 330 working days per hectare of land over the two seasons. Weeding requires 112 workings days, while harvesting and planting require 52 and 40 days, respectively. The rest of the time is assumed to be spent mainly in dusting. Across the year, January through February and August through September are the busiest months, each requiring 50 or more working days worth of labour.

Whereas the above recommendations are based on a hypothetical situation, they do form a good basis on which to discuss actual practices. This is taken up in Chapter 6. The present discussion will dwell on maize production trends in the District.[19]

Area planted and amounts harvested

The amount of land under maize fluctuates from year to year. As we will see in Chapters 4 and 6, this is a function of several processes. In general, between 1914 and 1964, increased output was sought through extensive cultivation and area under maize more than quadrupled in some years. From a mere 18,623 hectares in 1944, the area under maize rose to occupy a record 70,850 hectares in 1954, at a time when the area under finger millet and sorghum was declining (cf Figures 1.1 & 4.1). This unprecedented increase in maize acreage did not however last long. The popularity of the crop started declining beyond normal annual fluctuations as a result of a decrease in its demand on the market and a shift to the cultivation of what were then seen as higher value crops, such as coffee and tea (Chapter 4). By 1968, the area under maize was down by more than half, compared to the mid 1950s, and this decreased by a further one half in 1969 (Figure 1.1).

However, in general, these reductions in area under maize did not correspond with overall output. For example, in 1969, maize output rose by about 48 percent over the 1968 period. This upward trend was even more dramatic in 1970 and 1971 when the District almost quadrupled its maize output compared to previous years (Figure 1.2).

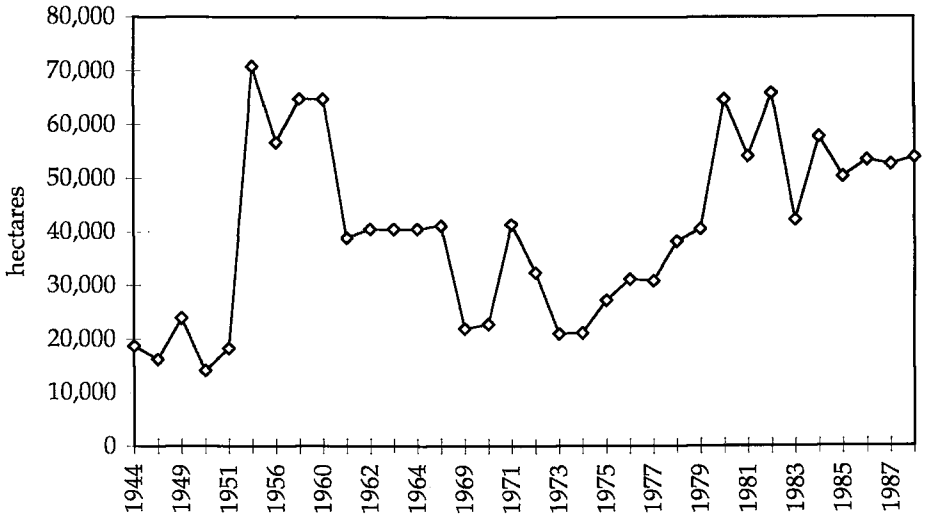


Figure 1.1 Area under maize in Kisii District, 1944-1988
Source: Compiled from Agricultural Annual Reports, Kisii District

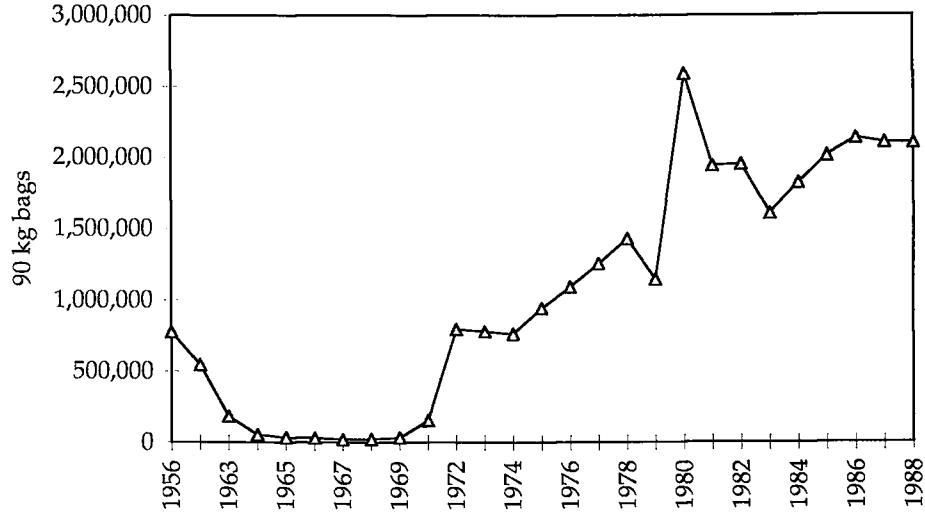


Figure 1.2 Maize harvests in Kisii District, 1956-1988
Source: Compiled from Agricultural Annual Reports, Kisii District

The observed rise in output and at a time when there was a less significant increase in area under maize was mainly influenced by the national campaign to modernise agricultural production, resulting in improved husbandry practices, intensification and higher yields (Chapter 3). In fact, although the area under maize suffered a downward trend during the famine years of 1972-74, this did not cause a corresponding and significant drop in output. But, in 1979, maize output fell by 20 percent due to adverse weather conditions, although its acreage rose during the same period (Chapters 3 & 4). And, whereas output rose again by 126 percent to reach an all time high in 1980, a downward trend emerged soon after this, with sharp reductions in 1981 and 1983 (Figures 1.2).

The above production trends suggest that despite the general drop in area under maize, there has been a relative rise in output. Nevertheless, both area planted and output have been marked by fluctuations. Whereas some of these fluctuations have coincided with food shortages in the District, such as was the case in 1965, others have not. On the contrary, although there was a drop in area under maize during the famine years of 1972-74, output remained steady. Furthermore, although 1980 was a famine year throughout the country, Kisii included, maize output in the District reached an all time high during the same period. Therefore, much as the famines that occurred in 1965, 1972/74, 1979/80 and 1983/84 were attributed to 'rainfall failure', the quantity of maize harvested in Kisii during these periods was not conspicuously low, relative to other years, except for 1979. And, even where these famines may have resulted from a relative reduction in food harvest, the expectation is that people turned elsewhere in an effort to meet their food needs.

The maize market

While there is a general assumption within Kenya's food policy (Chapter 3) and elsewhere in the literature (Chapter 2) that households will meet their food needs by growing it themselves or through making purchases, the ultimate ability to obtain the food that there is depends on whether one has sufficient income.[20] In addition, opting to take up markets fully or partially also depends on whether these markets can be trusted. This mainly refers to the possibility that food supply will be constant and prices predictable. In the discussion that follows, I look at what the maize market in Kisii offers in terms of unit cost and therefore, how dependable these markets are. I mainly focus on price fluctuations across years, within a given year and between selected market centres.[21]

Annual fluctuations, 1974-1997

Despite being a maize growing region, the consumer prices for maize in Kisii were (until about 1989 when the maize market in the country was liberalised) relatively higher compared to some of the non-maize growing regions in the country. For instance, in 1979, a 90 kilogramme bag of maize cost Kshs. 180 in Kisii whereas the same quantity went for Kshs. 112 and 117 in Kisumu and Nairobi respectively. These differences were even more marked in 1980, the same year that the District attained a record output. A bag of maize cost Kshs. 600 in Kisii compared to Kshs. 144 and 148 in Kisumu and Nairobi, respectively (Figure 1.3). This was largely as a result of a deliberate policy attempt to subsidise the consumption needs of the urban labour-force. In so doing, however, this policy further reduced the possibility that markets could serve as a source of food in rural areas. While it might be assumed that farmers in Kisii benefitted from these high prices, actual returns were very low. Producer prices as set by government were often not commensurate with the cost of production and, given the high costs of transportation, among other expenses, the farm-gate price was even lower. This means that a farmer could sell for less only to buy the same quantity of maize back but for more.

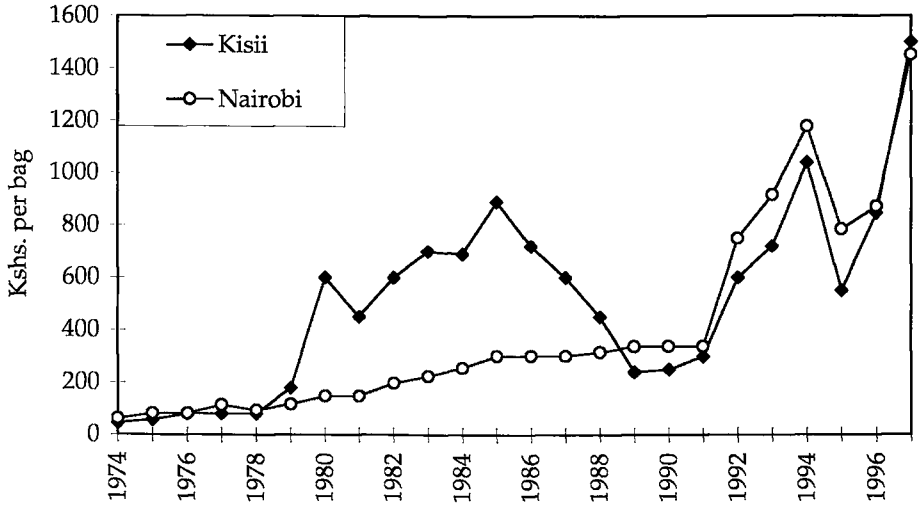


Figure 1.3 Average annual maize price per 90 kilogramme bag, 1974-1997
Source: Kisii Documentation and Information Centre

A look at the maize market in the District shows that prices are volatile. For instance, in 1997, the average cost of Kshs. 1500 for a 90 kilogramme bag of maize was almost double the 1996 price of Kshs. 845 and this was six times the 1990 price of Kshs. 250. And, in 1980 the price of maize rose more than three times, from Kshs. 180 in 1979 to

Kshs. 600 and, this marked the trend in subsequent years until 1988 (Figure 1.3). Although this drastic fluctuation was attributed to a country-wide drought, the maize harvest in Kisii was at its highest during the same year (Figure 1.2). This discrepancy arises from the fact that the country-wide shortages occasioned a higher than normal demand for maize and what there was in Kisii left the District before farmers would have realised the need to 'hold back' stocks. The high prices may therefore have resulted from having to import maize into the district, including the yellow maize that the government imported into the country. Such 'surprises' continue to influence the kind of decisions that households make regarding when to or when not to purchase food, if at all.

Seasonal variations, 1993-1997

Maize prices are also subjected to seasonality. While this could be assumed to result mainly from variations in supply versus demand, the period in question is not always predictable and, either way, this does not make markets a favourable choice. For example, in 1997, the average price of maize in Kisii rose from Kshs. 1170 in January to Kshs. 1850 in June and although this scaled down in subsequent months, it remained quite high until September. But, in 1996, some of the highest prices were experienced between September and January, which then includes the main harvest season in August/September. And in 1993, higher than average prices came into effect as early as April and these doubled by the month of December (Figure 1.4).

The general trend suggests that maize prices are highest at certain periods in a year. More than this, however, is the fact that these periods also coincide with a high demand for food and farm inputs, among other monetary expenses. This then means that making purchases has to be subjected to several considerations, a process that may not enhance the possibility that markets will be found favourable. In addition, monthly trends across years imply that in spite of general seasonal variations, the period in question is not fixed. Hence, it is impossible to plan ahead of time, a constraint that will not therefore permit individual households to have control over their lives and livelihoods.

Between market centres, 1997

Price fluctuations are also reflected across market centres within the District. For example, in 1997, the average price of maize in Daraja Mbili and Keroka was Kshs. 1500 and Kshs. 1578 respectively, compared to Kshs. 1636 and Kshs. 1698 in Nyakoe and Suneka markets. This however also varied within the year. From the month of October through February, Keroka market was the most expensive of the four centres. However, whereas maize prices almost doubled between April and July in

both Nyakoe and Suneka, this was not the case in Daraja Mbili and Keroka Markets (Figure 1.5).

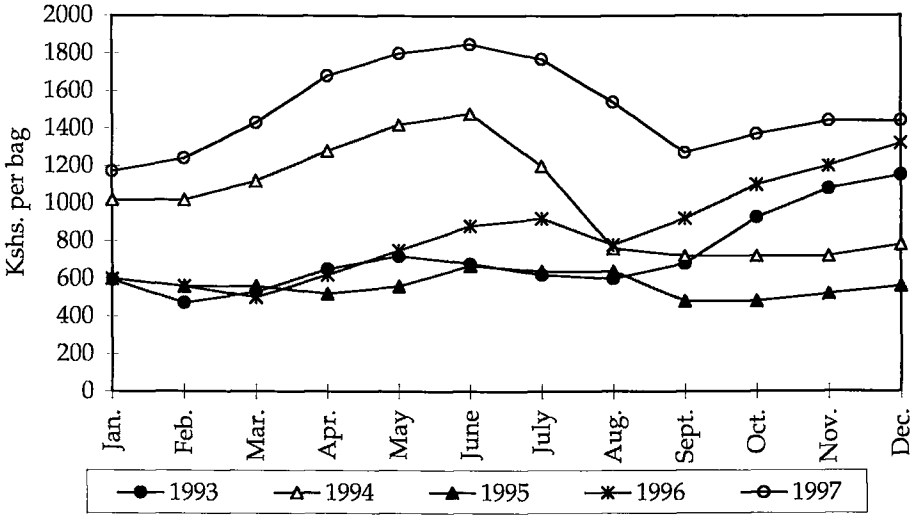


Figure 1.4 Monthly maize prices in Kisii District, 1993-1997
Source: Department of Agriculture, Kisii District Annual Reports

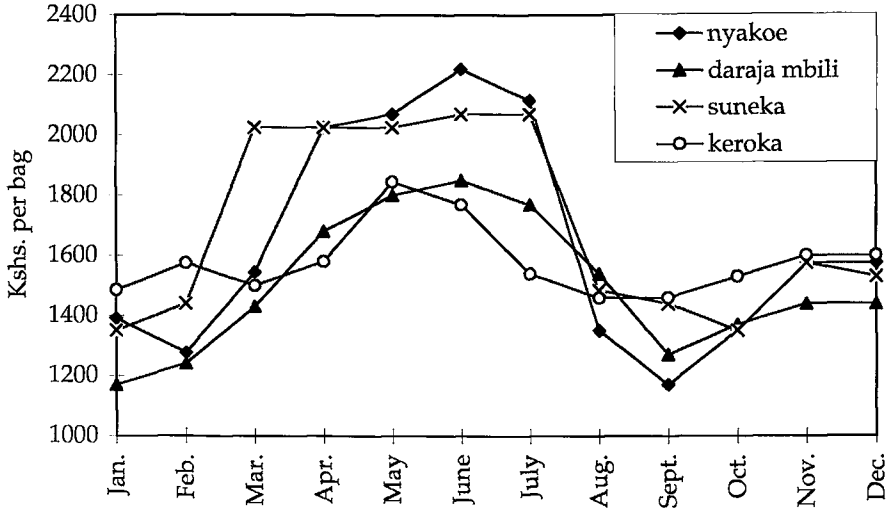


Figure 1.5 Monthly maize prices in Nyakoe, Suneka, Daraja Mbili and Keroka Markets, 1997
Source: Department of Agriculture, Kisii District

Whereas both Nyakoe and Daraja Mbili fall within Kitutu Chache, where this study was undertaken, the latter is within the Kisii Municipality, while Nyakoe is several kilometres away and within walking distance of most of the households that were interviewed. The price fluctuations in Nyakoe suggest that this market centre offers the lowest prices when there is plenty but it is the most expensive when there is a drop in supply. Therefore, for households that are served by Nyakoe market, in either case, the maize market is not favourable as they may be forced to sell for less only to buy back for more. Compared to Daraja Mbili and Keroka markets, it can be argued that the price of maize in relatively urbanised centres is not as volatile. Nevertheless, the prices at most of these markets are higher than the District average (Kshs. 1500).[22]

The maize market in Kisii can therefore be described as not favourable for households that might have to purchase food and on an instantaneous basis. These households may not be able to plan ahead even during the same year and especially when their incomes are not regular. In addition, the decision to engage in purchasing depends on where one lives, relative to some of the markets that offer relatively better possibilities. As we will see in Chapters 4, 5 and 7, these considerations continue to influence how households choose to organise their search for food.

Food supply versus demand

It is apparent that food supply in Kisii is characterised by fluctuations, most of which suggest that there has been a downward trend in output, but one that is generally consistent with national trends. For example, although acreage under maize in Kisii constituted about 10 percent of the national average in 1963, and this dropped to about 4 percent in the 1970s, it again rose to about 9 percent in 1980, before dropping 6 and 7 percent in 1981 and 1985, respectively. In 1988, the area under maize in Kisii constituted about 8 percent of the national average (cf Figures 1.1 & 3.1). These fluctuations are also observed for aggregate output but not necessarily during corresponding periods. For example, between 1982 and 1988, maize output in Kisii constituted about 8 percent of the national aggregate (cf Figures 1.2 & 3.2).

According to the District's Agricultural Reports, in general, except for the months of May, June and July when Kisii experiences what has come to be described as seasonal shortages, there is a sufficient supply of food during the rest of the year. It is then argued that, at the rate of 135 kilogrammes of maize per adult equivalent per year, the food that is available in the district is sufficient for each individual person.[23] The underlying assumption is that those households that do not meet their food needs through cultivation can obtain additional supplies on the market. But, as we have observed, the food market is largely unreliable, especially for those who may need to turn to purchasing on an instantaneous basis.

Hence, this supply-demand configuration tends to ignore the fact that food distribution varies between individual households, food markets may not be physically and economically accessible, and even more important, a food harvest, even if at subsistence level, is expected to provide much more than meeting consumption needs. And, as we will see in the empirical chapters, such a conclusion eclipses the day-to-day experiences among rural households, which nevertheless impact on their food security status. This study aims, therefore, to understand how the search for food is organised and, specifically, how adequate food comes about, and for whom in particular.

Synopsis

This study argues that achieving food security is a process and one that shifts and swings. Points of stability mark the food security position of households and this depends on people's day-to-day practices. These undertakings draw on how households conceptualise their life chances and this is situated in larger livelihoods, a framework that consists of both commodity and non-commodity relations. Discussions throughout this thesis are therefore directed towards understanding what goes on at the rural household level, during the search for food and, in particular, how adequate food is gained by some and not by others. Chapter 2 strives to locate answers to the research question within the existing literature. Using both the entitlements approach and the various perspectives emerging from the commoditisation process, I show how the search for adequate food is perceived as likely to come about. In addition to bringing out some of the major shortcomings within these positions, I indicate how this study intends to proceed.

In Chapter 3, I discuss Kenya's food policy. By looking at the country's agricultural activities under colonial rule and the philosophy behind Kenya's food policy, I show how the country's policy position is likely to impact on food entitlements, and therefore, the kind of challenges that this position portends at the rural household level. The overall aim of the chapter is to highlight how food security is conceptualised at the policy level and, how the search for adequate food is envisioned. Noting that command over adequate food may have eluded many at the rural household level, in spite of the country's food policy, I go 'back in time' to look at the transformations that have taken place (or failed to take place) in one agriculturally endowed region, Kisii District. Chapter 4 therefore places the study question in a historical perspective. Several agricultural interventions, transitions and transformations that took place among the Gusii are traced to the points where they start impacting on food security. How the Gusii struggled with and sometimes accommodated apparent contradictions in agricultural strategies is the central focus. I conclude the chapter with an account of some of the major food shortages that have afflicted the Gusii.

Chapter 5 dwells on the strategies that households employ to secure food. The aim is to understand how households work towards meeting their food needs but in a diverse and yet inter-related manner. Among the salient features is that these strategies are characterised by contestations and trade-offs, most a result of a struggle to reconcile the real with the expected. Given the central role that cultivation occupies both at the policy and household levels, I take up food cultivation for further analysis. In Chapter 6, I discuss the production process by looking at the interrelatedness in farm practices, the incongruity in approach and the ideology underlying the choices that are manifest in people's everyday lives. I conclude the chapter with a discussion on the future of cultivation as a source of food. And, in Chapter 7, I delve deeper into people's livelihoods. I look into the potentiality of the possibilities that are open to rural households once they face food shortages arising from a shortfall in harvests. I mainly focus on the kind of social and economic networks that households develop to meet their food needs, namely, seeking assistance or making purchases. I also explore the social transformations taking place in the specific relationships in which these possibilities are embedded and how shortfalls continue to be accommodated in people's everyday lives.

The complexity of household food security is pursued further by looking at how some succeed while others fail in the search for adequate food. In Chapter 8, I focus on the relationship between obtaining and failing to obtain adequate food supplies and several of the factors that are assumed to constitute food entitlements. In addition to the variations that emerge in food security positions, I strive to bring out some of the discrepancies that continue to dominate the search for food at the rural household level. Finally, I revisit key discussions throughout the thesis with the aim of synthesising the search for food in the context of my study. Hence, in Chapter 9, I pull together the various ways in which food security is conceptualised and practised. By separating what is real and therefore practised from what is imagined but nevertheless important, I come to the conclusion that attaining food security is the outcome of a constantly negotiated process.

Notes

1. This refers to neo-liberal policies, mainly the privatisation of the production process. In the agricultural sector, affected governments are urged to discontinue subsidies, to disengage from the marketing of farm inputs and farm produce and to give preference to export crops. See Chapter 2.

2. As argued by Long, in real life, 'all forms of external intervention necessarily enter the existing life-worlds of the individuals and social groups affected, and in this way, they are mediated and transformed by these same actors and structures (Long 1992, p.20). Therefore, although certain structural changes result from the impact of outside forces, it is theoretically unsatisfactory to reduce one's analysis to the level of external determinism alone. There is a

need to bring out the interplay of factors and the central role played by what Long describes as human action and consciousness. This is because actors are not disembodied social categories or passive elements. On the contrary, they process information and strategise in their dealings and these external processes are not only internalized, but they also come to mean different things to different interest groups and individuals (Long 1992; 1997a). This also suggests that even within what looks like a similar endowment or exchange mapping, the food needs of households are not similarly met or even perceived.

3. Long therefore criticises earlier applications of the actor-oriented approach for their tendency to adopt a voluntaristic view of decision-making, for explaining social behaviour primarily in terms of individual motivations, intentions and interests, for giving little attention to examining how individual choices are shaped by larger frames of meaning and action and, for treating social life and especially social change as reducible to the constitutive actions of individuals, and therefore presupposing a universal model of human behaviour, much of it based on a western framework (Long 1992, p.22-23).

4. This also means that we must view the search for food as a dynamic and therefore an ongoing relationship whose interactions are not only two-way, but also differentiated. As Long has argued, this kind of analysis makes it possible to see the different ways in which actors interpret and manage new elements in their lifeworld, how they create space for themselves, and how these interactional and interpretive processes influence and are themselves influenced by the broader structural context (Long 1984).

5. See Long 1994; 1997 and cf Hebinck & van der Ploeg 1997.

6. Long has argued that all societies contain within them a repertoire of different life styles, cultural forms and rationalities which members utilise in their search for order and meaning and which they themselves play (wittingly or unwittingly) a part in affirming or restructuring. Hence, the strategies and cultural constructions employed by individuals are drawn from a stock of available discourses that are to some degree shared with other individuals, contemporaries and perhaps predecessors (Long 1992). Long however notes that behaviour cannot be attributed to culture as actors draw on only certain aspects of whatever culture it is, hence his reference to a cultural repertoire (Long 1997a). In other words, while cultures exist, those that live them only draw on them selectively and the combinations of these practices are diverse.

7. This includes highlighting differences in paradigms and obscuring discontinuities, which however contribute to an understanding of the processes by which planned intervention enters the life-worlds of farmers and how they are then mediated, transformed and eventually come to form part of the resources and constraints towards realising household needs, food security included (Long 1992, p.35). Therefore, although planned intervention is based on a linear model which also presumes continuity, in real life, there are also discontinuities as depicted in discrepancies in needs, values, interests, knowledge and power.

8. Such an analysis was necessary because, as also argued by Strauss & Corbin, social phenomenon is continually evolving, persons are actively shaping and reshaping the worlds they live in, life is complex and varied, and there is an interrelationship between conditions, meanings and actions (Strauss & Corbin 1990). Although I did not follow the daily activities of each of the household members that I took up for in-depth study (cf Villarreal 1994; Mongbo 1995; Verschoor 1997; Jansen 1998; Breusers 1998), I nevertheless looked at how they interpret and strategise for purposes of meeting their food needs, how they resolve problematic situations, how they process their experiences, how they assign new meaning to these experiences, and what shapes the choices that they make.

9. Although Kitutu Chache once constituted part of the maize exporting region in the District, and it falls in the upper midland (UM) agro-ecological zone, with red volcanic soils rich in organic matter, the area has little of the conventional cash crops as compared to other parts of Kisii. As shown on Map 1.2 the two major conventional cash crops, coffee and tea are mainly found outside of Kitutu Chache. As will become clear ahead, the introduction of non-food crops did not occasion a large-scale shift away from food crop cultivation. Instead, most households continue to produce both for the market and for home consumption.

10. This sample was picked by randomly selecting a maximum of four of the five locations that make up Kitutu Chache (Marani/Mosocho Division). This was further sampled by randomly selecting only one sub-location from each of the selected four locations. Thereafter, a proportionate random sample of households was drawn from each sub-location based on the 1989 Population Census, as follows: Mwakibagendi in Marani (75), Ngokoro in Kegogi (65), Sensi in Ngenyi (40) and Bogeka in Nyakoe (60). Although the 8 households that were taken up for in-depth study were selected from among the randomly drawn sample of 240 households, this choice was not based on representation. The survey only aided me in identifying households with characteristics that were of interest to the study question, largely, how households organised their search for food.

11. Kitutu Chache consists of the former Marani Division (Map 1.3) which has since been split into Marani and Mosocho Divisions. These divisions have several Locations, namely: Marani; Kegogi; Ngenyi; Chache; and Nyakoe. Although all these are administrative boundaries, they bear some relationship with clan and ethnic boundaries. Kitutu Chache has one parliamentary seat.

12. This excludes Nyamira District.

13. The case studies and life history accounts were selected for their exploratory power rather than typicality. These individual accounts are therefore aimed at providing a deeper meaning to issues that would have otherwise remained obscure. The issues that they dwell on, however, emerged as of widespread concern.

14. The specific issues that were researched are covered in Chapter 2. In addition, I pick up some of these concerns in greater detail in the individual chapters.

15. The National Statistical Abstracts classify smallholders as owning between 0.5 and 30 acres of land (Kenya 1986, p.90; 1994c, p.95).

16. To a large extent, both at the national and household levels, adequate food is seen as equivalent to sufficient maize. National level estimates suggest that maize is grown by nearly 90% of Kenya's rural families (Bates 1989, p.93). At the policy level, it is argued that the country needs to be self-sufficient in maize because this grain cannot be secured easily or economically on world markets (Kenya, SP No.1 1986, p.71).

17. Both CAN and UREA are Nitrogen-fixing fertilisers. Although UREA is richer in Nitrogen than CAN, it is more expensive. In the 1997 season, a 50 kilogramme bag of UREA sold at Kshs. 1,100 while a similar quantity of CAN cost Kshs. 900, excluding the cost of transporting them to the farm. DAP replaced Ammonium Phosphate which is no longer stocked, the main reason being that DAP is considered more effective. During the same period, a 10 kilogramme bag of maize seed cost Kshs. 735, up from Kshs. 625 in 1996.

18. One working day is estimated as eight hours of work from a healthy man or woman. As will become clear in Chapter 6, most rural households engage in more than maize cultivation. The demand for labour is therefore high and unlikely to be met, partly because the farm activities that require such labour cannot support this kind of investment.

19. I limit this analysis to the period ending 1988 because after this the figures are no longer comparable. Kisii District was split into two, taking effect in 1989. Currently, the Gusii region comprises Kisii, Nyamira and Gucha Districts.

20. District incomes could not be ascertained. However, according to the 1996 Welfare Monitoring Survey (Kenya 1996), households in Kisii District have a monthly average income of Kshs. 10,074. This comprises money from wages and salaries (3870), sale of crops (1658), other agricultural activities (2767), and non-agricultural activities (1778). The average income for Kisii District is higher than in Kisumu (Kshs. 7,627); Siaya (Kshs. 5,462); and Nyamira (Kshs. 5,607) Districts. Instead, this average income of Kshs. 10,074 for Kisii approximates such places as Kiambu (Kshs. 10,143). This does not, however, give a good guideline because these calculations include crops that are grown and consumed at home, in addition to obvious limitations in using averages for an area such as Kisii where resource distribution is highly skewed. This is even more obvious when we look at estimates arrived at for Tana River (Kshs. 11,023) relative to Mombasa (Kshs.14,252). The role of income in food purchases is discussed in the empirical chapters of this thesis.

21. These market places were selected for purposes of comparison. Both Nyakoe and Daraja Mbili are major market centres in Kitutu Chache, while Suneka falls within close proximity. Keroka was selected because it is one of the major markets though it is located several kilometres away from Kitutu Chache. The main aim is to demonstrate the nature of options that households are likely to be faced with, once they run out of food. In the process, I also bring out the differences that there are between rural and urban based market centres.

22. These are nominal prices recorded by the marketing department within the Ministry of Agriculture. Although these prices are not adjusted for rising cost of living, they are here used to demonstrate trends. While increase in price reflects a rise in cost of living, often incomes do not rise accordingly. In general, therefore, these prices actually demonstrate people's increasing inability to afford paying for services.

23. The Ministry of Agriculture has based this 'foodbasket' of 135 kilogrammes of maize per adult equivalent per year on the assumption that households will supplement intake with other food. As we will see in Chapter 7, this is not always the case. People's eating habits and food preference in particular, are such that some of the supplements are not found desirable. Again, this presents some of the dilemmas that continue to dominate the area of food security; the difference between balancing supply with demand versus being able to respond to people's needs. The latter refers to the choices that people continue to make as regards what they consider to be 'food'.

CHAPTER 2

CONCEPTUALISING FOOD SECURITY: A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Food security is one of the most debated of basic needs yet perhaps the least resolved of them all. Much of this debate can be narrowed down to two issues: a concern for an increase in supply so as to satisfy demand and the call for improvements in entitlements so as to enable those in need to access the food that there is. Hence, some of the complexities surrounding these issues emanate from observations that food insecurity exists in spite of great strides in agricultural innovation and, not all people can access the food that there is. According to the modernisation school, the hungry are short of food because of their refusal to embrace commercial values, which are assumed to generate efficiency in resource mobilisation. There is the contrary argument, however, that commodity relations arising from the commercialisation of the factors of production engender hunger, and this continues to be perpetuated by imbalances in terms of trade, a skewed distribution of world resources, and neo-liberal policies. Although opposing in inclination, these two perspectives tend to postulate that food security is a function of supply versus demand and in so doing, they negate observations that show a co-existence between hunger and abundant supply.

As outlined in Chapter 1 and explored further in Chapter 4, Kisii District is an agriculturally endowed region that once engaged in considerable food exports. Among the questions that therefore emerge is: what has brought about the changes in the food security patterns? In this chapter, I highlight some of the theoretical explanations that have been offered in the literature. The aim is to assess the extent to which these various strands of arguments can account for the food security position among rural households in Kisii District, Kenya.

The entitlements approach to food security

A useful approach to begin an understanding of these complex phenomena is Sen's 'entitlement's model', which holds that food security flows from possessions and these stem from endowments which then constitute one's entitlements (Sen 1981; 1990; 1995). According to Sen, entitlements fall into any one of the following four categories (Sen 1981, p.2): ownership through commodity exchange (*trade-based entitlement*), the right to own what one grows on the farm (*production-based entitlement*), the sale of one's labour power for purposes of earning an income so as to purchase food (*own-labour entitlement*), and the right to own what is given by others (*inheritance and transfer entitlement*). Among the model's strongest tenets is the assertion that food insecurity can exist without any (substantial) decline in the

general supply of food and, even when food shortages are widespread, they do not affect everyone uniformly. Different groups and individuals have different commanding powers and an overall food shortage only brings out these contrasting powers. In recognition of variability in endowment, the 'entitlements approach' advocates a greater refinement of the categories of those affected or not affected by food shortages (Sèn 1981, p.156). To a large extent therefore, this approach explains how food security is gained, and why some groups starve while others don't. In other words, what enables some and not others to access adequate food.

Exchange mappings: translating endowments into food

Endowments in themselves do not bring about adequate food, they only provide the potential to secure food. What becomes of this potential, that is, whether one's endowment or ownership bundle translates into adequate food depends on what Sens calls 'exchange mappings'. This refers to the network of relations that govern how much food one is able to obtain through cultivation/exchanging with nature, or through purchasing and hence an exchange with others, or through seeking and receiving assistance/transfers (Sen 1981, p.2). For example, the food security of households that seek to obtain their food through cultivation is assumed to be determined at the point of harvesting. But, prior to this, such exchange depends on whether the farmer owns sufficient amounts of the main factors of production, namely land, labour and capital, to enable him to exchange adequately. On the other hand, in exchanging with others, a person's exchange entitlement, given his ownership bundle, is influenced by employment opportunities, returns to non-labour assets relative to the cost of food, what a person can produce with his own labour-power and the resources he can buy and manage, the cost of purchasing resources and the value of what he can sell, and obligations that he must attend to (Sen 1981, p.4). In his later works, Sen argues that transfers and inheritance also constitute entitlements, to the extent that in countries where the social security system is operational a drop in exchange entitlement does not occur because the affected persons can benefit from state intervention (Sen 1995, p.57).

Food security is therefore assumed to depend on the entitlement relations that govern possession and use. This refers to what people *own* and what this ownership can *command*. In addition to the significance of addressing what constitutes possessions, it is also critical to know how and whether this can raise adequate food. As aptly described by Sen,

> 'a barber owns his labour power and some specialised skill, neither of which he can eat, and he has to sell his hairdressing service to earn an income to buy food. His entitlement to food may collapse even without any change in food availability if for any reason the demand for hairdressing collapses and if he

> fails to find another job or any social security benefit. Similarly, a craftsman producing, say, sandals may have his food entitlement squashed if the demand for sandals falls sharply, or if the supply of leather becomes scarce, and starvation can occur with food availability in the economy unchanged. A general labourer has to earn his income by selling his labour power (or through social security benefits) before he can establish his command over food in a free-market economy; unemployment without public support will make him starve. A sharp change in the relative prices of sandals, or haircuts, or labour power (i.e. wages) vis-à-vis food can make the food entitlements of the respective group fall below the starvation level (Sen 1981, p.155).

Consequently, ability to command enough food depends on one's *endowment* (ownership bundle) and, subsequently, on the *exchange entitlement mapping* (the function that specifies the set of alternative commodity bundles that the person can command respectively for each endowment bundle). For instance, a farmer who owns land, labour and other productive resources could be faced with several possibilities. H/she could choose to grow his own food, or he can purchase food using a wage earned from selling his labour or growing other crops that can be marketed for cash, or he could benefit from inheritance and transfers. Sen therefore concludes that such possibilities (which he refers to as available commodity bundles) stand for the exchange entitlement of the farmer's endowment (Sen 1981, p.45-46). The pattern that an exchange entitlement mapping takes, is, however, conditional. It depends on the legal, political, economic and social characteristics of the society in question and on people's positions within it (Sen 1981, p.46). Richards has further argued that the functioning of these entitlements depends on

> 'beliefs, created in political practice, about who ought to get what, under what circumstances, and the embodiment of those beliefs in legal and economic process e.g. land tenure rules, notions of family obligation, wage rates, rules of market transaction, etc. Such standards are contingent and time-bound (they are specific to particular historical circumstances). Consequently, they do not (and cannot be expected to) work according to absolute standards of equity. Nor can they be predicted from an economic model' (Richards 1983, p.46).

Hence, food security possibilities cannot be defined in universal terms. Even within the same ownership position, exchange entitlements will be different depending on what economic prospects are open to each person and this depends on the mode of production and the person's position relative to production relations (Sen 1981, p.4-5; Devereux 1993a, p.143; 149). In Kenya, smallholder farmers face at least two possibilities: to grow some or all their food, or, through incomes generated on-farm and/or off-farm, to obtain required food on the market. Therefore, assessing the

food security of these households demands that we look at what they have and what this can command while exchanging with nature or with others.

Loss of entitlement

A collapse in one's entitlement results from a breakdown in the network of entitlement relations and this, according to Sen, is an outcome of an unfavourable shift in the exchange entitlement mapping, or a loss of possessions (Sen 1995, p.54). In other words, people can fail to secure adequate food because they own nothing, or because what they own cannot be exchanged for adequate food. Although this explanation makes several assumptions, among them, that supply is guaranteed and adequate and, secondly, that resources in possession will be used in the purchase of food, it does account for the existence of hunger, particularly amidst plenty. As argued by Drèze and Sen, if people go hungry on a regular basis all the time, or seasonally, explanations lie with an entitlement system that fails to give these persons adequate means of securing enough food (Drèze & Sen 1989, p.24). Consequently, a fall in wages, a rise in food prices, loss of employment, a drop in the price of goods that one produces and sells, make it no longer possible for those concerned to acquire enough food. However, in order to understand the precise influences that make it possible or not possible to acquire enough food, we need to examine the conditions of these exchanges and the forces that govern them (Sen 1995, p.50). The rest of this discussion dwells on how a collapse in exchange entitlements translates into food insecurity.

Some people go hungry because what is in their possession cannot be exchanged for the food that is otherwise available. Drawing examples from Tete Province in Mozambique, Raikes shows that, in 1984, people died of starvation despite there being no overall food deficit in this well-watered highland area with significant food surpluses (Raikes 1988, p.91). This was because those holding food surpluses needed to exchange them for goods that were not available in Mozambique (at the time). Consequently, the major proportion of the food was sold across the border in Malawi in exchange for consumer goods, and none of this food moved to the southern part of the province which is much drier and poorer. This breakdown in entitlement relations occasioned a shift in exchange mappings, and a subsequent failure to command existing sources of food. Raikes however notes that in general,

> 'those who suffer worst from food shortage are primarily those who have no (or insufficient) land for own production of food, those who by custom or through lack of jobs are forced into dependent relationships to kin or non-related households, and specifically those whose rights within such relationships are weakest. The level of savings is also an important factor, since those especially vulnerable to famine are often those whose savings are least held in forms

whose value falls drastically (in terms of food) when most needed' (Raikes 1988, p.70).

In circumstances where one's possessions are unlikely to attract the food on the market, exchanging directly with nature is then seen as providing a better bargain. It is argued that in the Sahel, unlike the farmers or the pastoralists who rely on what they produce and are therefore subjected only to variations in output resulting from climatic considerations and other influences, the cash crop producer is, in addition, subjected to shifts in the market for the commodities that he produces (Sen 1981, p.126-127). And, given that demand for cash income at the rural household level outstrips supply, this continues to necessitate that households avoid spending limited cash income on what they can grow (Netting 1993; Garine & Koppert 1988). But, inability to store sufficient quantities over long periods of time soon translates into food insecurity and especially during the annual 'hungry season', a time when the value of assets is also lowest (Devereux 1993a, p.43).

It is therefore argued that constant food shortages will be found among the absolutely poorest strata and that this is related to a lack of income, since it occurs even when there is plenty of food for those who can afford it (Raikes 1988, p.70). For instance, in an attempt to turn Sudan into a breadbasket for Saudi Arabia, and following the devaluation of its currency, a greater amount of the country's sorghum was diverted from the domestic food market to exports as livestock fodder in Saudi Arabia (Raikes 1988, p.70).[1] And, while the price of grain increased by a factor of four during the 1984 famine in Sudan, that of livestock fell to a tenth of their previous level, rendering herders helpless (Raikes 1988, p.87 quoting D'Souza & Shobam 1985:521).[2] Evidently, some legally guaranteed rights of ownership, exchange and transaction bring forth economic systems that go hand in hand with some people failing to acquire enough food for survival (Drèze & Sen 1989, p.20).

Similarly, whereas the 1972-74 famine in Ethiopia was occasioned by failure of the main rains of 1972, resulting in an obvious decline in harvests, this only transformed into a famine situation due to negligence by the Ethiopian government and the international community to intervene in time (Sen 1981, p.87). Citing the example of the Wollo region, Sen argues that what took place there was, in addition to being a direct entitlement failure, a result of a collapse of income and purchasing power as demonstrated by the inability of the people to attract food both in their midst and from elsewhere in the country (Sen 1981, p.94; p.99; p.101).[3] And, much as the 1984-85 famine had been foreseen, there was no adequate response, given the aversion of Western governments to the political regime in Ethiopia at the time (Raikes 1988, p.85). That there was a prolonged delay is evident from the fact that during this famine,

'people stayed in their villages so long as they had any money to purchase food. When all had been spent and all chattels sold, houses were pulled down and the

> wooden frames sold at the roadside for the pitiful sums they would fetch as firewood. Finally, destitute families set out on the roads with only inadequate clothing and remaining silver pieces, both family heirlooms and their absolutely last security. Those who succumbed were those with least chattels, smallest houses and least silver and, as always in such situations, items had to be sold for a fraction of their normal value' (Raikes 1988, p.86).

In linking food security to entitlements, it has been shown that loss of entitlement to food can arise from a breakdown in the network of relations governing exchange with nature or with others and this results from a shift in exchange mappings, or a loss of possessions necessary to effect exchange or due to failure to effect transfers. We have, however, also seen that entitlement relations vary, to the extent that what one owns, and how much it can command at the exchange mapping level varies from place to place. It is a product of the social, historical and political processes that have taken place over time, and how the individuals concerned have responded to these changes. In this study therefore, I look at the interplay of external and internal processes of change and how these have come to influence people's ability to command adequate food.

The relevance of Sen's approach to the study of household food security

Sen postulates, with illustrations, that food security depends on one's endowment bundle, that is, one's resources (Sen 1981, p.45). In other words, endowments form the basis for the possibility that a person or household will obtain adequate food, and this possibility takes effect at the exchange mapping level. Hence, actual performance and therefore the food security position depends on the possibilities facing those in need of food, relative to their endowments. Therefore, although it has been argued that the entitlements approach is not a complex causal theory, with precise concepts that can be hypothesised, operationalised and universally applied, and that Sen restricted himself to extreme cases (Gasper 1993, p.5-8), this approach introduces a useful dimension to the study of food security - the need to treat the search for food and subsequent success or failure as resulting from a *network of relations*. Hence, the entitlements approach presents the search for food as embedded within a larger framework such as the social, economic and political processes in a given region. Indeed, Sen has argued that 'if deaths occur, it is at the end of a famine rather than at the beginning' (Sen 1981, p.5) and famines can follow from many different types of causal processes and therefore the search for some invariable indicator is quite hopeless (Sen 1986a; 1986b; 1995).

However, although the entitlements approach comes closest to explaining why and how some succeed while others fail to obtain adequate food, this perspective nevertheless has limitations. Sen actually admits that by concentrating on

entitlements, something of the total reality is obviously neglected in the approach. But, he also poses the question, how important are these ignored elements and how much of a difference is made by their neglect (Sen 1981, p.50). In a later publication, Sen seems to have accommodated some of the criticism by stating that the entitlements approach by itself does not provide - nor is it intended to provide - a detailed explanation of any famine, and such an explanation would require supplementation by more specific theories, so as to account for shifts in entitlements (Drèze & Sen 1989).

The rest of this section is an attempt to examine some of the shortcomings of the entitlements approach for the study of food security at the rural household level. I mainly focus on the non-applicability of the dichotomised nature of Sen's entitlements, and how these shortcomings are catered for in this study.

Sen conceptualises State transfers as central to food security and, by so doing, he puts the role of the State at the centre of entitlements. Yet, in addition to these being non-existent in most of Sub-Saharan Africa, both social security and public provision may not always work when those at risk have no legal right to demand provisions or if they are not well mobilised to effect this demand. Many countries are plagued with maldistribution of relief food supplies, with little resistance from those entitled to these supplies, because relief food has remained a gift, a non-entitlement. Furthermore, by conceptualising entitlements as operational within existing rights and privileges,[4] Sen presupposes that what is legal is fair and effective. And, although in his later works he seems to have corrected this anomaly by coming up with the notion of 'extended entitlements', most of the exchange entitlements remain only potentially effective commands (Gasper 1993, p.26), which may or may not lead to adequate food. For example, in exercising the legal right to own land, many farming communities in Kenya have subdivided their land parcels beyond economic utility. The subsequent failure to produce enough on the basis of land size thus falls within the existing legal framework, as also does the fact that productive land lies idle elsewhere and those much in need have no legal right to utilise it. There is therefore a need to go beyond current legal provisions in order to focus on the origins and shifts in such entitlements. This leads to a deeper understanding of the ways in which individuals and households lose their entitlements precisely because of the existence of these legal provisions.

In his analysis of various famines, Sen concentrates on the nature of these entitlement failures but leaves out the more important component, the sources of failure. He does this by exploring the economic backgrounds of those who became destitute,[5] but fails to account for why some occupations were not as rewarding, nor how those occupying such positions could have negotiated their survival prior to these distresses (de Gaay Fortman 1990:27-28 in Gasper 1993, p.12). Therefore, by treating entitlements as 'given', Sen fails to explain how these relations are determined and how they develop over time (Devereux 1988, p.272; 1993a, p.80). And, as a result of looking only at the nature of entitlements, Sen ends up concentrating on

'proximate causes' such as market prices and incomes, rather than the 'underlying causes' (de Waal 1990; cf Osmani 1991), that is, how entitlements are generated and destroyed and why only some become vulnerable when these entitlements collapse. Moreover, by restricting himself to an analysis by strata, Sen leaves out the possible variations that arise within a stratum, in spite of the supposed similarity in endowments. Such similarities include equal wages, uniform land sizes or more generally, a shared job description. Consequently, in reducing the search for food into a single relationship, the approach leaves out the possibility of a multiplicity of networks and therefore a co-existence of several exchange mappings. Smallholders in rural Africa, for example, often pursue several possibilities simultaneously and the search for food is interwoven within wider livelihoods. Hence, by focusing on occupation, the entitlements approach neglects the more important processes in the search for food, namely social relations.[6]

And, in spite of a recognition that famine is the culmination of various 'events',[7] Sen gives little attention to the processes of change during famine. He therefore overlooks the role of other intervening elements, to the extent that the victims of the famines that he describes appear passive (de Waal 1990, p.472), although he does attempt to highlight migration and the search for employment as some of the immediate responses. Consequently, despite Sen's acknowledgement that deaths only occur at the end of a famine (Sen 1981, p.5), the entitlements approach tends to capture only the end result, famine. But, in real life, starvation is preceded by several processes pertaining to how people choose to use available opportunities. For instance, it has been argued that culture, habit, skill and preference may interfere with the food security of a population in the sense that such a population may limit its choices in spite of existing potential entitlements. Hence, some people may prefer to balance their increased risk through under-nutrition while they maintain assets such as livestock (Gasper 1993, p.5; Devereux 1993b, p.52; Drèze 1990, p.84; de Waal 1989a, p.7; Swift 1989, p.10).[8]

Lastly, Sen makes an unrealistic assumption that in the face of food shortages, households whose entitlements lie with exchanging with nature (cultivation) will reduce their demand for non-food commodities that are likely to occasion selling some of their food stocks (Sen 1981, p.103). He further argues that direct entitlements are not affected by sales, most likely because his argument is based on the erroneous assumption that only surpluses are marketed. On the contrary, food insecurity can take place without any drop in direct entitlements, that is, the ratio of food harvest to actual demand. For instance, households could harvest adequate food but end up with shortages as a result of engaging in practices that deplete these stocks, such as making sales or giving out food assistance. At the entitlement mapping level, however, such households would appear to have a productive exchange mapping, though in practice this might be non-existent. This particular weakness of Sen's approach coincides, rather unfortunately, with assumptions made by those who advance the food availability paradigm.[9] Likewise, government policy has often

gone astray because of stopping just here, assessing food security on the basis of potential output.

Beyond entitlements

The present study, then, commences with the entitlements approach for understanding food security patterns at the rural household level. This serves as a useful starting point for exploring answers to questions such as, who is food secure and who is not, why has 'regular' hunger persisted for some and not for others and what opportunities exist in terms of unexplored entitlements? We have seen that, according to the entitlements approach, the food security position of households and individuals is determined at the exchange mapping level and this depends on their endowment bundles. Hence, the possibility that households will be able to obtain the food that they require depends on the command that they enjoy over existing sources of food. The question is, however, what determines this command? In other words, how do entitlements come to be, and what underlies the functioning (and mal-functioning) of subsequent exchange mappings?

Therefore, while the entitlements approach accounts for variations in food security or indeed the ability to be or not to be food secure, it does not explain how these endowments and accompanying exchange mappings, which are so central to achieving food security, come to be, why they vary, why they may be inadequate, or why they should count in the first place. I position this dilemma in its historical context. I therefore show how both commoditisation and commercialisation (of agriculture) as processes have contributed to variations in endowments (entitlements) and the possibilities that these endowments offer (exchange mappings) as sources of food. By going beyond a simple focus on entitlement relations, I hope to bring out the transformations that have shaped entitlements and their accompanying exchange mappings. For instance, I look at the processes that have generated the distribution of land holdings as they now exist, a resource that largely determines who can exchange adequately with nature. I also show why those less endowed with land do not move on to access cash incomes and other resources that would make it possible for them to obtain sufficient food on the market. My aim is to demonstrate the degree to which people can determine their entitlements and subsequent exchange mappings, and to show how these are also largely an outcome of certain (external) processes. Such an analysis therefore brings out what underlies entitlements as they now exist and, in particular, the political, socio-economic and historical processes that nurture a collapse in exchange mappings. In the analysis that follows in this thesis I will therefore go beyond entitlements by focusing on the intricate details that govern food not only as a commodity but also a *social* instrument.

Commoditisation of the production process

According to the modernisation school, command over adequate food derives from a modernisation of the factors of production which is assumed to stimulate output as households work towards raising a surplus for the market and industry. Proponents of this theory further argue that the market acts as an incentive to producers while also making food available to the urban labour-force. At the same time, engaging in industry is assumed to reduce the number of people dependent on the farm for their food needs. There is therefore a general belief that commercialisation of the production process allows for efficient mobilisation of resources, following the 'emancipation' of these resources from ascribed bonds. Diffusion of market relations is equated with the diffusion of rationalisation and the application of scientific methods, both of which are seen as necessary for the breakdown of equilibrium-oriented production in the peasant mode of production.[10] Commercialisation is anticipated to take place at two levels, through an increase in marketed produce and as a result of using purchased inputs. Commercialisation is also seen to include basing product choice and input use on the principles of profit maximisation. In the agricultural sector, it is then envisaged that market relations will result in a labour process with a commercial orientation, a movement out of non-traded inputs in favour of purchased ones, and a decline in mixed farming which then gets replaced with specialised enterprises (Pingali & Rosegrant 1995, p.171).[11] It is further assumed that as opportunity cost becomes the overriding concern, commodity relations dominate and these are assessed in terms of their market value.[12]

The question therefore is, how come that commodity relations are perceived to continue to spawn food insecurity in Africa while they are believed to have enabled other nations to overcome persistent hunger?

Policy disincentives

Food deficit countries are generally viewed as characterised by unsuitable policies which are then seen as giving rise to conditions such as unplanned population growth, low technological applications, inefficient institutions and under-utilised resources - all which are then presumed to render these countries food insecure.[13] Modernisation theories therefore argue that the hungry are necessarily short of food because of their refusal to effectively embrace commercial values. And, whenever commercialisation is reported to have taken place without a corresponding effect on food security, it is argued that this is because the operating institutions are inefficient and tied to peasant rationality which is assumed not to resemble in scale and scope, commercial transactions.[14] As such, failure to be completely integrated and profitably so, attributed to a constant attempt to keep the principles of the market at bay,

is held responsible for the marginalisation of smallholder economies and subsequent food insecurity.[15]

Affected countries are then urged to re-orient their economies by investing in resource mobilisation, re-focusing on how these resources are utilised, liberalising trade and, undertaking institutional reforms (Green & Faber 1994, p.4).[16] And, in addition to eliminating free or subsidised services and control of public enterprises, these governments are compelled to promote tradable commodities. The latter recommendation is seen as only possible if countries forgo policies which engender subsistence production so as to specialise in export crops where they supposedly enjoy a comparative advantage (Braun 1995; Braun *et al* 1993; World Bank 1986; 1994; Cowen 1983).[17]

In Kenya, the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) were first introduced in the 1980s. In the agricultural sector, major policy reforms have included liberalisation of markets both for farm produce and inputs, withdrawal of subsidies on these inputs, including extension services, the privatisation of parastatals and subdivision of State farms. These reforms are based on the premise that liberalisation will give way to efficacy which will then result in adequate food, among other benefits. At the household level, the assumption is that production for the market will bring about food surpluses, and for households that enjoy better returns in alternative resource use, incomes earned will enable them acquire staple food on the market. The overriding assumption therefore is that market-oriented policies lead to enlarged opportunities.[18] The question however is, whether these reforms alone are capable of promoting access to food at the rural household level?[19]

In addition to there being several cases that demonstrate a parallel between economic growth and food security, this perspective makes several assumptions, among them, that the steps towards realising economic growth will be compatible with and therefore not in competition with the search for adequate food. But to the contrary, a high dependence on agricultural export commodities (at the expense of food production) can result in undesirable vulnerability to the external shocks and stress imposed by the vagaries of international markets - especially because the so-called comparative advantage is not competitive. Looking at what these policies have meant to the African farmer, especially poor farmers and other vulnerable groups, the March 1988 Khartoum Declaration felt that, so far, rather than making poor people less vulnerable, SAPs are achieving the reverse (Adedeji 1988). The reforms are viewed as having resulted in reduced standards of living due to high commodity prices following reductions or total elimination of government subsidies.[20] Therefore, while incorporation may result in economic growth, this could also bring about marginalisation and in particular, affect the strategies that people have already put in place for purposes of obtaining food.[21]

Furthermore, whereas modernisation of the production process assumed a central place in the agricultural policies of many governments, Kenya included, and a substantial amount of resources continue to be directed in pursuit of this goal, the

break-through in agricultural innovation and, in particular, the discovery of Green Revolution technologies has not led to the realisation of 'food for all'. One of the main disappointments is that the 'miracle' has not been widespread and hunger continues to abound. In addition, even where there is evidence of 'success', this has continued to co-exist with food insecurity, a direct challenge to technology as the overriding answer to entitlement failure. Therefore, while there may be hope on the food production front, there is also despair in terms of the absolute number of people going to bed hungry.[22]

Pre-occupation with the functioning of the production process is based on the assumption that once supply is assured (through commercial farming), food security will ensue. This, however, fails in several ways. By concentrating on supply versus decline, advocates of commercialisation of agriculture fail to give attention to the difference between food supply and ability to access this food. As rightly argued by Sen, by concentrating on the question of numbers, the Food Availability Decline (FAD) and associated approaches to food security have overlooked the reality, primarily: who can command the food that there is and how much of it. As such, the supply-demand configuration arising from the modernisation approach does not tell us how food insecurity can develop even in situations where there is no decline in food availability, nor does this approach explain why some groups have to starve while others can feed themselves, and what allows one group rather than another to get hold of the food that exists (Sen 1981).

Therefore, while the policy orientations of most developing countries may account for their poor food security status, this does not explain fully why commodity relations have not given way to desired results. For instance, food surpluses have not automatically ensued even within 'modernised' enterprises, nor has movement into industry reduced the number of people that are possibly dependent directly on subsistence production for their food needs. And markets have not entirely increased opportunities. Hence, what else accounts for the discrepancies that remain?

Trapped in a world economy

The African perspective, as envisaged by The Lagos Plan of Action, explains food insecurity and related problems on the continent as resulting from mutually related and interdependent factors in the economy, mainly a limited economic power leading to a vicious circle of the situation (OAU 1985, p.11-18).[23] The persistence of hunger on the African continent is then seen as resulting *not* from a decline in total world food availability, but because of a drop in the value of goods to be sold in exchange for *this* food. Food entitlements have thus come to be associated not only with production and market transactions, but also with political power (Sobhan 1990, p.79; Raikes 1988, p.88). In much of Africa therefore, drastic changes in the continent's food security are closely linked to the distortion (and destruction) of

subsistence forms of production, and subsequent incorporation into world markets.[24] Exacerbated by the unfavourable terms of trade that have accompanied this incorporation, the commoditisation of the production process is seen to continue to render smallholder producers incapable of realising themselves on the market, while they are, at the same time, increasingly dependent on market exchanges for their basic consumption needs.

In addition, commoditisation is believed to have disorganised farm households by destroying insurance mechanisms built into subsistence production without replacing them with any new forms of security.[25] It is for example argued that seasonal stress has more serious effects upon the poor under market relations than in societies characterised by pre-capitalist relations whereby assistance was provided to the poor and victims of misfortune. Instead, in commodity-based societies, the transfer of political power to national state level reduced and even eliminated the obligation of leaders and the wealthy to assist the needy, and with the development of commodity markets, food has taken on a *price* and, hoarding and speculation have replaced redistribution as responses to food shortages (Raikes 1988, p.71-75).[26]

Although there are several strands to this debate, the general argument is that commodity relations alter access to the means of production.[27] Hence, whereas food shortages existed in Africa prior to colonialism, commercialisation is believed to have set in motion a number of social processes which then altered the social set-up around which people organised their food needs, resulting in vulnerability to food insecurity. Consequently, hunger has come to be seen as inseparable from poverty and food insecurity as reinforced by the normal workings of the market. For example, Mackintosh has argued that as markets spread and transform rural areas, individuals also come increasingly to depend upon the workings of markets for survival. They sell goods or their own labour to buy food, which increases the *vulnerability* of many people, especially those who own few resources bar their labour. She then singles out small farmers, pastoralists, labourers, crafts workers as among those that become vulnerable not only to drought and pests but also to changes in prices and quantities on volatile markets, a level of susceptibility that she attributes partly to changes in how these payments are made, and partly to the weakening and disappearance of old methods of insurance against disaster (Mackintosh 1990, p.43).[28] Therefore, much as markets predate colonialism in Africa in the sense that various forms of exchange already existed (Chapter 4), these markets are now feared for what they are perceived to be, unpredictable, distant, impersonal, and un-affordable. Hence, even households that are faced with persistent and somewhat regular shortfalls at harvest continue to 'resist' markets as a source of food.

The fear of markets and other disadvantages resulting from dependency on external sources for food has therefore continued to dominate the policies of many governments in respect to how they should best approach their food security. In this connection, it has become increasingly difficult for these governments to willingly

choose to rely on food imports, which will be dependent on agricultural exports, whose value is determined outside their realm of power.[29] Therefore, to date, self-sufficiency in staple foodstuffs forms the backbone of the food security agendas of many countries.[30] Similarly, at the household level, smallholders would rather provide part of their own household subsistence as a safety measure than become entirely specialised, market-oriented producers of agricultural commodities. The question is, however, what then limits the capacity of these households or even nations to successfully pursue policies that they seem to chart out for themselves, and at will?

Ensminger (1976, p.553) has argued that the above limitations need to be placed in a historical perspective. He states that in the post-independence/war period, it is only countries like Japan, Taiwan, South Korea (and China) that developed policies targeting the small farmer. These included land reform programmes, small-scale farmer tailored institutions and services, agricultural technology that was oriented towards the resources and managerial competence of the small farmer, emphasis on intermediate and selective technology which introduced mechanical power only where crucial in the farming cycle, and the provision of appropriate security and educational programs regarding risk reduction. Thus, the transition from traditional to modernised agriculture was facilitated, unlike elsewhere in the world where the elite-dominated power structures did not take the kind of political decisions that would aim at bringing the small farmer into national policies.

The day-to-day experiences of rural households

In the preceding sections, it has been argued that food security is a function of what you own, what exchange possibilities are offered, what is given freely and what is taken away. I have, however, also pointed out that in the search for answers regarding the food security position at the household level, there is a need to explain how these endowments and subsequent exchange mappings, both of which are so central to shaping and re-shaping the food security patterns of households, come to be. I have positioned this in relation to the commoditisation debate, which provides two opposing interpretations. One school of thought argues that incorporation creates the necessary diversity in terms of expanding (existing) sources of food. Expanded choices are mainly associated with the introduction of modern farming methods, the availability of food markets and the creation of employment opportunities. And, in cases where this has given way to food insecurity, such an outcome is blamed on partial incorporation, a general resistance to champion markets and therefore an unwise reluctance to embrace modernity. Contrary to this is the argument that commoditisation only enlarges choices for a few while narrowing options for the many. Hence, dependency on markets generates a shift in entitlements without creating an environment that would bring about a rewarding incorporation.

But, rural life is far more complex than the dichotomy implied above, constituting external versus internal processes. While I recognise that both commodity and non-commodity relations are major players in rural livelihoods, these two processes are also shaped and re-shaped by the day-to-day experiences of those that encounter and interact with them. In a recent review on the commoditisation debate, Long contests the existence of two distinctive modes of value and practice, namely one dependent upon market rationalities and another governed by non-market principles and social reciprocities. Noting that reality is much more 'messy' than this, he states that 'casting the analysis primarily in terms of commodity versus non-commodity forms shifts attention away from the more intriguing problems of how, when and by whom commodity values, over and against other types of value, are judged to be central to the definition of particular social relationships and to the status of specific goods' (Long 1997b, p.233). And, building upon their 1986 *Commoditisation Debate*, Long further argues that

> 'commoditisation is driven, defined or contested by the actions of specific actors. It is not a disembodied process with its own 'laws of motion', nor can it be reduced to some abstract notion of 'market forces' that propel people into gainful economic action or impoverish them. Rather, commoditisation processes take shape through the actions of a diverse set of interlinked social actors and are composed of specific constellations of interests, values and resources. Commoditisation has no given and necessary trajectory, except that negotiated by the parties involved, and as a process it is never 'complete'. It constitutes a label we apply to ongoing processes that involve social and discursive struggles over livelihoods, economic values and images of 'the market'. In fact it is more a way of looking at things than a clearly defined special category of things' (Long 1997b, p.234-235).

Therefore, by going beyond the simple dichotomy of external versus internal, commoditised versus non-commoditised relations or even the mere focus on the interplay between any of these forms of existence, we are better placed to come to levels that demonstrate the role that each of these processes plays in the lives of rural households and in particular, how non-commodity relations actually advance the commoditisation course and vice versa.[31] This then suggests that to understand the search for food among rural households, we need to take into account the role that is played by commodity and non-commodity relations as a unity, and the context in which this takes place. For example, at the point when rural households enter into commodity production, there are other processes, already in existence, influencing their search for food. As such, when these external elements are taken up, they do not replace existing practices, and neither is the result necessarily incremental.[32] Instead, at the point of incorporation, non-commodity relations remain an integral part of this process. As such, both commoditised and non-commoditised processes

blend and, intentionally or otherwise, they reinforce and perpetuate one another.[33] In other words, what we are likely to observe during the search for food at the rural household level is an outcome of a diversity of processes. For instance, Adams (1993) shows that the 'moral economy' has persisted in rural Mali, an observation that he partly attributes to inability to rely solely on the State or market mechanisms. He therefore argues that the distinction between the 'moral' and 'market' economies in Mali is blurred by a long history of co-existence whereby

> 'commodity exchange blends with patron-client relations as local market traders provide interest-free cereal loans to reward the loyalty of rural clients. In a similar way, the volatility of cropping fortunes and need for money income has necessitated the development of broad and diverse transfer networks which encompass local reciprocity as well as wider orbits of exchange involving urban migrants, market traders and the State' (Adams 1993, p.49).

Hence, whereas food security has continued to be one of the most debated of basic needs, missing from this debate are the day-to-day experiences of those engaged in the search for food. Yet, we cannot begin to understand food security at the rural household level without bringing to the picture, the *actual* experiences of these households, and in particular, how they conceptualise and thereafter interweave their goals, opportunities and constraints, in an attempt to meet their food needs. Therefore, the fact that (some) households in a high potential region, such as Kisii, lack adequate food generates additional questions, among them: how do these households define their food needs, what possibilities face them, what influences the choices that they make and, how do some succeed while others fail during this search? The present study therefore examines how food security comes about and for whom in particular.

Working definition of food security

This study conceptualises food security as a household's ability to command an adequate amount of staple grain (primarily maize) through any one or a combination of existing sources. And, over and above the quantities that may be obtained, food security could still remain unattained if households have insufficient/little and/or unpredictable command over any or a combination of existing sources of food, or this command is gained at the expense of other equally compelling needs.[34]

Given the central position that cultivation continues to occupy as a source of food, among rural households, I look at the agricultural activities of households and, in particular, the amount of land that is accessible, labour input, cropping patterns, and crop husbandry practices. And, in order to relate this to the search for food, I focus on who uses cultivation as a source of food, when and how. Noting that households

could gain access to required food through other land use practices, I also look into cropping patterns and in particular, how these relate to the food security position of households. I therefore focus on the proportion of land under food crops, mainly maize, which I then compare with the uses to which households may have put the rest of their land.

Further, I focus on access to resources and, in particular, on the amount and sources of land, labour and capital available to households and how they are utilised vis-à-vis their food requirements. The possibility that households enjoy a cash income is derived by looking at earnings from the sale of food and conventional cash crops (mainly tea and coffee) and livestock products, wages, returns from business investments and remittances. I thereafter relate the material well-being of households with their food position by specifically looking at who purchases food, when they do so, how much this costs, what other household expenditures exist and how cash income is generally apportioned. This operational definition of food security goes beyond what is available for consumption by looking at the ability to meet food needs over time, and without compromising that which is equally basic. I therefore focus on what is purchased as opposed to what people's incomes can buy. The former scenario is more precise because it deals with the actual situation, whereas in the latter, much is based on assumptions regarding how people are likely to spend their cash incomes. In addition, I assess how long food supplies from harvests, purchases and assistance received last relative to consumption needs over a one year period, and the possibilities that households face in an attempt to close the gap between demand and supply. I then narrow this down to the social networks that households have put in place for the purposes of safeguarding their food needs.

Associated with this is a measure of food security that looks at consumption patterns and in particular, if there are any variations in food intake. Such variations could be in terms of the quantity or quality of food consumed or, who gains access to the food that there is at household level. Household members could experience varied entitlements, partly because of what Harriss has described as the *modus operandi* of patriarchy (Harriss 1995, p.224). However, other than looking at demand, this study does not go into the details of the actual composition of what is consumed and by whom. This therefore excludes calorie intake as a component of food security.[35] While the caloric approach is important and necessary in providing life, it does not allow for what it takes to feel food secure. Secondly, basing a food security assessment on calories operates on several assumptions, many of which do not hold in real life situations. I do recognise, however, that limiting adequate food to how people perceive it presents the danger that people could feel food secure even when they are clinically malnourished.

Understanding farm households

This study is about food security in Kenya and this is contextualised around the experiences of rural households in Kitutu Chache, Kisii District. Although much of what I look at could pass for individual experiences and practices (that are nevertheless socially bounded), the household remains a major focal point, especially when looking at the food supply-demand configuration. But, existing literature suggests that the concept of household is variedly understood. I will thus discuss briefly some of these variations before moving on to show how the 'household' is understood and applied in this study.

The 1989 National Population Census in Kenya referred to a household as a person or group of persons who live together in the same dwelling unit or homestead and eat together (Kenya, Population Census 1989).[36] The Rural Household and Expenditure Surveys conducted by the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) define a household as constituting one or more persons who eat together and have a common cash account (Kenya 1977; 1981b). In their study on rural landlessness in Kenya, Alila *et al.* defined a household as comprising a person, or group of persons, generally bound by ties of kinship, who normally reside together under a single roof or several roofs within the same compound and who share the community of life, in that they are answerable to the same head and, they share a common source of food (Alila *et al* 1993).[37] Similarly, in discussing the farm household as a unit of observation, Janelid (1980) defines a household, which may include both family members and persons other than kin relations, to refer to a group of people who occupy a housing unit as a collectivity, and interact as a social unit. The interactions of members of a household include, sharing residence and meals, using family labour for production and consumption activities, influencing decision-making and allocation of household resources, and exchanging labour with neighbours or participating in traditional mutual-aid groups, and common organisational and recreational activities.[38]

It is, however, argued that whereas a household denotes common residence and economic cooperation for production, consumption and reproduction, due to the several transformations that have taken place, household members now include those present and those physically absent (Netting & Wilk 1984). Consequently, the most important members of many households could be those who are not in residence at all, but supply such households with vital cash remittances, goods and services (and occasionally also draw on the household's resources). Indeed, while certain persons may not be physically present as members of a household, parents and siblings may look up to them for support and/or render them support in case of need, food requirements included.[39]

The view that a household necessarily implies co-residence is further challenged on the basis that food production and consumption, for example, are activities that are not necessarily confined to a single house. They could be carried out in a number

of houses and in relation to different groups of people in a single day (Guyer 1981; Netting & Wilk 1984). This then obscures the spatial, social and conceptual boundaries of households as having a productive locus, and it makes it impossible to attempt to analyse any given household unit as though it were a single and final set of social and economic roles and statuses, or as if it were uniform for every one (Netting & Wilk 1984). Further, the household model is viewed as inappropriate (for Africa) due to problems associated with defining household membership and maintaining records of people with such high mobility rates, which in turn make precise calculations of production and consumption patterns in terms of household labour constraints and food requirements problematic (Guyer 1981). Guyer has additionally argued that far from the household being a discrete entity, its boundaries are often very permeable since the unit is embedded within wider structures. Thus, besides overlapping memberships, there is no isomorphic relation between units of production, consumption and investment as assumed in current farm management (Guyer & Peters 1988). This means that the activities carried out by one household, such as resource flow, cannot be fully explained without resorting to the links and transfers among such units. For example, an individual who eats in one household may sleep in another and contribute resources to yet another, simultaneously or exclusively.

In spite of these conceptual weaknesses, the household remains essential to understanding food security patterns. As a unit, it provides a locus with discernable boundaries and in the case of this study, land acquisition and subsequent utilisation are closely tied to the establishment of a household in rural Kenya.[40] In using the household as a departure point, this study considers membership as composed of resident and non-resident individuals, who then may be constituted for different purposes, including production, consumption and reproduction.[41] Hence, although much of the food security strategies that I discuss centre on individuals, they can be said to draw their mandate, real or imagined, from a wider spectrum, mainly household members and related networks. For example, some decisions regarding how a household's food needs will be met are individually constituted but collectively executed and vice versa (Chapter 5).

I therefore apply the concept of household to refer to a person or group of persons who live together and/or depend on and/or jointly cultivate a common piece of land and/or are answerable to the same head and/or share a common source of food. However, within and beyond each household are several (joint and/or individual) networks that enable individual household units to subsist even when each is assumed to manage its own resources. These networks of activities, that often extend beyond physical boundaries, are studied in as far as they impact on the search for food.[42] Hence, in order to go beyond the 'static' structural component of the physical aspects of a household as a unit, I also look at the household as a *social arena*. I therefore focus on inter-household and intra-household networks and, in

particular, the negotiations and social struggles surrounding the search for adequate food.

Notes

1. This process is enhanced by the fact that large tracts of land in Sudan belong to Saudi Arabian nationals. For example, it is reported that one Saudi prince owns 1.2 million acres (about 2,000 sq. miles) of land in Sudan. Besides, most resources in Sudan are concentrated in the hands of a few local and foreign merchants (Raikes 1988, p.87).

2. Several other reasons also account for the loss of food entitlements in Sudan. These include civil war and drought. See de Waal 1990; 1993; Braun *et al* 1993.

3. While there is information to corroborate Sen's observation that food left Wollo region at the height of the famine, the reasons for this differ. Whereas Sen has attributed this outward movement to a lack of demand on the part of the Wollo people, Devereux, quoting de Waal states that the food that left Wollo at this time was due to extraction by landlords who continued to demand land rent from tenants in spite of the drought (Devereux 1988, p.174).

4. Sen 1981, p.45; 1984, p.497; Drèze & Sen 1989, p.20.

5. Sen 1981, p.87-130.

6. Arguing along the same line, de Waal (1990, p.473) states that while Sen recognises that social disruption, migration and disease are all part of famine, the entitlements approach makes no room for these, and instead concentrates only on command over food through production and exchange.

7. Sen 1981, p.5.

8. However, while commenting on de Waal's re-assessment of the entitlements theory in the light of famines in Africa (de Waal 1990), Osmani has argued that Sen developed the entitlements approach to shed light on the proximate cause of famines in modern times, and the approach is therefore not intended to handle the dynamics relating to these causes (Osmani, 1991, p.587). By so stating, however, Osmani also admits the critique that the entitlements approach does not cover the dynamics of famine. In response to this, Fine states that Osmani tends to overlook the fact that differences in method are as contested as approaches to famines themselves, and that this may inform the debates over the entitlements approach (Fine 1997, p.621). Fine therefore argues that the differences have to do with the tension between macro and micro analyses. Together with a reference to Osmani (1995, p.254), Fine states that the entitlements approach is micro in orientation.

9. This paradigm supposes that food security is a function of the balance between supply and demand. By the very nature of this assumption, emphasis is put on making food available (through increased production, distribution and marketing), and concern only begins to rise when there is a decline in supply. The fallacy is that, in so doing, this approach

ignores the difference that there is between having stocks and being able to access them.

10. For example, Seavoy explains that cultivators settling in the English-speaking colonies in North America produced assured surpluses because the chief piece of intellectual baggage that they took with them to North America was commercial social values, and the institutions that they established were shaped by these values. He contrasts this with (his assumption that) cultivators who emigrated to Latin America from Spain and Portugal were peasants, who upon settlement replicated their subsistence institutions on the vacant lands of the New World, and never commercialised food production, resulting in endemic hunger and delayed industrialisation, in spite of abundant labour and raw materials (Seavoy 1989). See also Wolf 1966, among others.

11. Therefore, commercialisation necessarily results in the need to depend on markets, hence the establishment of commodity relations.

12. There is therefore an assumption that these commodity relations bind households and individuals to external forces and institutions, leading to less independent decision-making and inability to meet consumption needs outside the market. Braun has however argued for the need to differentiate between commercialisation of agriculture and the commercialisation of the rural economy. He contends that the differences between these two processes become more obvious when off-farm non-agricultural employment exists (Braun 1995, p.188). However, contrary to Braun's categorisation, these two processes actually reinforce each other. For example, off-farm incomes make it possible for households to depend on purchased farm inputs. On the other hand, market values may occasion movement out of subsistence farming.

13. Braun *et al* see some of the policy failures as evidenced in low agricultural productivity; extensive environmental degradation - much of it as a result of households lacking in appropriate technologies resulting in land mining to survive in the short run; lack of rural and urban nonagricultural employment opportunities which then limits non-farm incomes; limited access to education; and poor health and sanitation conditions (Braun *et al* 1993, p.75). See also Drèze & Sen (1989, p.6). They have argued that many famines in the World have actually arisen from and been sustained by inflexible government policies that undermine people's ability to command food.

14. Seavoy (1989) has stated that, in the absence of a complete transformation from subsistence to commercial farming, even peasants with access to Green Revolution technology (including credit) and instant markets for surplus food, will experience as much hunger as peasants without access to these technologies. He seems to miss the point further on when he argues that both commodity and non-commodity systems of production cannot co-exist.

15. This line of argumentation dominated the thinking in the 1960s, and it has persisted to date. During this period, it was argued that 'the man who farms as his forefathers did cannot produce much food no matter how rich the land or how hard he works, [but] the farmer who has access to and knows how to use what science knows about soils, plants, animals, and machines can produce an abundance of food though the land be poor' (Schultz 1964, p.3). The commercialisation of agriculture school therefore advocates the *development* of peasant

agriculture, which is assumed to be engaged in static traditional practices, using unproductive and poor methods of farming (Vandergeest 1988, p.8 quoting Mosher 1966 and Schultz 1964). For example, it is argued that in Africa, adoption of new agricultural technology is not sufficiently widespread to make a significant impact on traditional modes of agricultural organisation and production and, to a degree, that will lead to food surpluses (Oluwasanmi 1976). Instead, farming on the continent is perceived to have remained ensconced in its traditional mould. It is then felt that such households are necessarily vulnerable because the family farm is the basic unit of multidimensional social organisation, land husbandry is the main means of livelihood directly providing the major part of the consumption needs, and that they operate within a specific traditional culture (Howe 1991 citing Shanin 1973).

16. In recent times, the need for social safety nets to cushion the poor has also been proposed.

17. In response to an acknowledged deterioration in Africa's economic conditions, and in spite of differences in interpretation, African governments and the World Bank alike, saw the need to institute reforms. The 1983-85 widespread drought and famine in Africa triggered a meeting in July 1985 under the auspices of the OAU (Organisation of African Unity). This meeting launched Africa's Priority Programme for Economic Recovery (APPER). The programme aimed at revitalising agriculture by giving priority to food and agriculture and specifically, by increasing the percentage of resources spent on agriculture. Similarly, in 1986, the UN General Assembly convened a special session. This session came up with the UN Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development (UN-PAAERD). It served to reinforce the objectives of APPER. The dim economic prospects confronting African economies were, however, attributed to structural mishaps and domestic policies. Among the major recommendations was the structural adjustment programme (World Bank, 1981). This programme was therefore developed as an alternative approach to Africa's recovery and given to African governments for implementation as a pre-condition for more aid and debt rescheduling. The reforms demand that African states must: cease to give free services and also cease to guarantee employment. The programme argues that African states are currently over-extended, resulting in inefficiency and ineffectiveness; public enterprises should be sold out to private entrepreneurs so as to create competition, raise productivity and improve the level of efficacy; and governments must institute policy reforms that are in favour of agricultural exports. These structural adjustments are also closely tied to macroeconomic reforms (Hindle 1990) and the two have also been associated with governance, and in particular, the role of the State (Aboyade 1994; Green & Faber 1994; Engberg-Pedersen *et al* 1996).

18. In relation to this, it is argued for example that, although the Middle East countries are prone to low and variable rainfall, they have, unlike countries in the Horn of Africa, been able to eliminate famine following the modernisation of infrastructure and markets (Devereux 1993a, p.36 citing Cox 1981). See also Hyden 1983, p.207; de Waal 1989a; Rahmato 1987 cited in Devereux 1993a, p.118; Pingali & Rosegrant 1995, p.176. However, this argument tends to ignore the fact that the two regions enjoy varied economic power.

19. According to the World Bank, SAPs have had very positive effects on those countries that have implemented policy reforms (African Farmer, 1988). These reforms are said to have improved agricultural production, labour productivity, efficiency, and overall economic growth.

20. For instance, the removal of subsidy on agricultural inputs has given rise to increases in the prices of these inputs, rendering them un-affordable and therefore affecting the cost of farm produce (Engberg-Pedersen et al 1996, p.33; See also Raikes 1988). In line with Chambers' conceptualisation of vulnerability, it can be further argued that these reforms have generated defencelessness, insecurity and exposure to risk, shocks and stress and difficulty to cope (Chambers 1989, p.1). As a result, most coping strategies have increasingly become a cop out - see Davies 1993.

21. Marginalisation implies that capitalist development, in addition to causing major disruption in the short-run, may not be beneficial in the long run (Devereux 1993a). A marginalised person then becomes one whose mode of production has been seriously disturbed or destroyed by contact with capitalist institutions, while this person's productive energies have yet to be absorbed by these institutions (Wisner 1976). Sahli sees marginalisation as a historical process that results in the formation of harmful dependency (Sahli 1981).

22. See Swaminathan 1973; 1983.

23. It is, for example, observed that Africa's terms of trade for agricultural exports have worsened since 1981 (Delgado 1995, p.236). This has taken two dimensions, a drop in prices and a reduction in demand for these commodities. See also Maxwell 1992, p.4. Some of the processes that are seen to have engendered these limited opportunities include: colonial and neo-colonial structures that continue to be perpetuated by imbalances in terms of trade, skewed distribution of world resources, urbanisation, infiltration of new dietary habits, and neo-liberal policies (Organisation of African Unity, OAU 1985; Economic Commission for Africa, ECA 1980; Bernstein 1977).

24. See Engberg-Pedersen *et al* 1996.

25. Vaughan 1987; Bernstein 1977.

26. To the contrary are arguments that this only venerates a past that was otherwise full of uncertainties and misery. Wrigley (1976) has argued that as a result of the establishment of British colonial rule and the incorporation of East Africa into the international economy, most people experienced a definite rise in living standards. He further asserts that the colonial state protected Africans from famines, resulting in the explosive population growth in the region after 1920. He further contends that after 1919, when more than 150,000 Kenyans died from famine and disease, there has not been a real famine in the region. However, while the British colonial rule may have acted to alleviate hunger during food crises (mainly through the development of rail and road transport and the growth of the marketing system), other evidence suggests that in many instances, local socio-economic ties among the people were just as effective in enabling victims of hunger overcome their plight

(Herlehy 1984).

27. There are several variations within the commoditisation debate. For example, commoditisation is seen as the penetration of exchange value, the need to purchase factors of production, progressive dependence on external inputs, or a concept through which we could organise our understanding of a broad social process (Vandergeest 1988, p.16-20). On the other hand, commercialisation has tended to refer to production for the market, which necessarily generates commodity relations. In many ways therefore, although commercialisation and commoditisation can be viewed as two perspectives, in practice, the commercialisation of agriculture is a part of the commoditisation process, and the latter has come to present itself even among those who do not produce for the market.

28. See also Devereux 1993a, p.117; Drèze & Sen 1989, p.5; p.21; Wisner 1976; Harriss 1983 cited in Devereux 1993a.

29. Food imports depend on foreign exchange resources, the international supply situation and import prices. Therefore, for a net food importer, a sudden increase in international prices of food grain could be detrimental to national food security, if their foreign exchange reserves are inadequate. This is particularly vulnerable because import prices and availability of stocks (at world markets) depend on the outputs of exporting countries, their domestic policies and international inflation (see Alamgir & Arora 1991, p.8). In the case of many African countries, the type of commodities traded necessarily result in instability in prices, as most of these countries target the same market. In addition, their production relies on rainfed agriculture which is subject to a diversity of climatic constraints, among other natural uncertainties (see also Pingali & Rosegrant 1995, p.178). The risk of depending on food imports is compounded by the fact that food aid offers a limited recourse. The allocation of food aid is driven by factors more complex than just market forces and charity. Braun *et al* argue that supply by donors is influenced by fiscal constraints, world market prices and the availability of surplus production in exporting countries (Braun *et al* 1992, p.8). In some cases, this is also a consequence of political tradition.
Devereux has distinguished between forms of 'market behaviour' that could also account for this fear (Devereux 1993a, p.86-113). First, in case of increased demand, there can be 'market failure' (or what Sen refers to as 'response failure'), that is, the inability of markets to meet 'effective demand'. The possibility that there may be no food on the market at the point of need is conceivable in cases of severe reductions in supply/output. The alternative situation is attributed to 'pull failure', that is, the inability of the consumer to attract markets (Sen 1981). Braun et al (1993, p.76) further argue that food prices alone do not send appropriate signals to private traders and neither can they form the basis for public intervention. This is also attributed to basic infrastructure deficiencies and trade restrictions.

30. This is true for Kenya (Development Plan 1994-96), Lesotho (Moeketsi 1995), Tanzania (Geier 1995; Biseko 1995), Zambia (Banda 1995); Swaziland (Hlophe 1995); Malawi (Mughogho 1995); and even China (Zhibin 1990), among others.

31. For example, Netting found that besides cost, hired farm labour is not preferred because of the uncertainties that it creates. Such labour needs to be searched, supervised and paid, and information about the habits, character, knowledge, skills and reliability of hired farm

workers is costly to acquire. A kin based household reduces these transaction costs and the uncertainty inherent in hiring outsiders (Netting 1993). See also den Ouden 1995. Hence, in practice, non-commodity relations such as family labour actually foster commoditised processes such as producing crops for the export market, and vice versa.

32. In a rejoinder to Vandergeest's (1988) discussion of commercialisation and commoditisation theories, Long & van der Ploeg have argued that the commoditisation theory has not developed a convincing critique because it often operates within an ahistorical and linear model of agrarian change assuming a kind of zero starting-point for development (characterised by a general lack of commoditisation or integration into markets), beyond which development is assumed to take place, leading progressively through distinct forms and phases of commoditisation to the point where the extension of commodity production is historically complete, that is, production units and individuals are unable to produce and reproduce themselves outside the market economy (Long & van der Ploeg 1988).

33. Therefore the commoditisation model's assumption that the 'autonomy' of the farm household is lost to external market forces, and that capital and outside institutions penetrate the farm gradually taking control of production processes and decisions, and that integration into the market economy leads to individualization of households, is highly questionable (Long 1986). On the contrary, farmers are able to shape and re-shape the forces of commoditisation. See also Arce 1997, p.178.

34. As is evident throughout this work, food security constitutes a variety of meanings. Indeed, it can be argued that part of the reason why hunger has persisted has to do with failure to understand what food security entails. This discussion is taken up in Chapter 9 when I revisit the meaning of food security as practised in Kisii.

35. For example, Haddad *et al* have operationalised household food insecurity as a failure to meet at least 80% of recommended calorie adequacy (Haddad *et al* 1994, p.334).

36. This departed from 1962, when a household was defined by the National Population Census as a group of people living together, whether or not they occupied the same house or shared principal meals (Kenya, Population Census 1962).

37. Hence, the family is subsumed in a household. But, this is only in so far as family is viewed in its nuclear form, beyond which, several households could constitute a single family. For example, Mbiti (1974, p.107) refers to a household as the smallest unit of the family which is only conceivable as 'the family at night'.

38. Transfers and networks with other households are reported to play an important role for the survival of individual household units. Drawing from her Malaysian experience, Wong (1984) shows how the constant threat of a household's ability to reproduce itself was met by developing ties of transfer with a close kin or patron. She therefore argues that the household should not be limited to the co-residential dwelling unit. It must be extended to cover those units that participate actively in the reproduction of the members of the household, including a closer examination of transfers and exchange. Wong however notes

that transfers should be viewed as network patterns with different rules for different kinds of goods and services, more than isolated, tightly bound, internally coherent units with little to do with specificity of demands and responses.

39. Wilk (1984) has observed that the actions that define the household are as changeable as the units themselves, and any classification that fails to take this into account confuses the most obtrusive object of study - the household group - with the more important subject of study - the dynamic and adaptive abilities of that group. Wilk, however, notes that while households are not individuals, what they do is a product of individual negotiation, exchange, and decisions.

40. According to Wallerstein (1984), households make up one of the key institutional structures of the world economy and the historical development of 'household' structures has been consonant with changes elsewhere. Similarly, Hopkins (1987) has observed that in spite of changes in social organisation and technology, the household remains an important unit in Egyptian agriculture, an arena of activity that is not formed by the capitalist mode of production alone. Guyer actually concedes that although households cannot be considered as single units in which effort and expenditure are directed towards one unified production unit, there is much mutual dependence and complementarity within the household (Guyer 1981, citing Lawson, 1972; Hill, 1972; Hill 1975).

41. The way the household has been used in this study corresponds, somewhat with Long's discussion on social domains and arenas (Long 1997a, p.5). See also his discussion on activity fields (Long 1984).

42. Intra-household studies have shown that a household's food security position may not necessarily reflect the status of its individual members and this has implications for policies and programmes aimed at targeting the food needy (Haddad 1994, p.350). The present study, however, concerns itself only with the ability of households (or those charged with this responsibility in their respective households) to procure adequate food.

CHAPTER 3

KENYA'S NATIONAL FOOD POLICY: RUPTURES AND DISCREPANCIES

Disregarding variations in interpretation, Chapter 2 has argued that food security is a function of how the search for food is organised. Several actors are identified as influencing this process, among them, the State. The role of the State in the search for adequate food is largely conceived in terms of the formulation and implementation of policies that then generate a situation of food security (or insecurity).

Although the Kenya government did not develop a specific food policy before 1981, the country's food requirements were set to be met through the pursuance of broader policies within the agricultural sector. Food security concerns were mostly subsumed in agriculture because it was assumed that agricultural growth would automatically translate into adequate food at the household level. These policies, initially grounded in the African Socialism paradigm, have shifted with the general development agenda of the country, resources at hand, the struggle to maintain sovereignty and the challenges of a global co-existence.[1] Tracing Kenya's food policy from 1963 to date nevertheless shows that the ideology underlying the country's search for adequate food has continued to centre on improving the supply of basic foodstuffs, mainly grain crops. The question therefore is, what challenges does this policy position spur at the rural household level?

In this chapter, I discuss Kenya's drive towards achieving and sustaining food security. I look into the philosophy underlying the country's food policy and how this position is envisaged to translate into adequate food for all. By focusing on this, I aim to highlight how food security is conceptualised at the policy level, how the search for adequate food is perceived and, how these two processes are likely to manifest themselves at the rural household level. These concerns are addressed in four phases. Before the main discussion on the country's food policy and the kind of projects and programmes that are perceived as central to realising this goal, I briefly look at some of the agricultural policies that were in place at the transition to self-rule in 1963. I conclude the chapter with an overview on national food supply trends and the challenges inherent in the movement from food policy to food security.[2]

Food security under colonial rule: missed opportunities or ill-conceived policies

Colonial agricultural policy in Kenya was mainly guided by the need to promote settler agriculture. This was facilitated by the alienation of land and labour and the consequent demarcation of the country's regions into the privileged 'White Areas' and the neglected 'African Reserves'. Nonetheless, African farmers were also seen as a source of food, revenue and raw material for industry. There was therefore a

deliberate attempt to involve them in commercial farming, although only in as far as this did not interfere with the operations of the settler farmers.

African farmers' incorporation into markets was planned to be facilitated through the provision of advisory services which aimed to introduce farm practices that would, it was assumed, result in increased productivity of land and labour, raised incomes and better standards of living. The desired farm practices mainly related to land use and in particular to farm management, and this was largely interpreted to mean ability to pattern farm practices along lines other than what the African farmer was already accustomed to. The ultimate goal was to establish production for the market and therefore make available raw materials for industry and food surpluses for those engaged in wage employment. In spite of a concern to balance cash and food crops, there was an underlying preference for export crops.[3]

However, one of the most radical of the policies concerned the country's land tenure system. In addition to land already alienated, it was proposed that security of tenure over land should be gained through the issuance of title deeds, and that a minimum economic size of land was required and this was to be brought about by consolidation of fragmented holdings or by enclosure of commercial lands. It was therefore envisioned that only able, energetic or rich Africans would be able to acquire more land while bad or poor farmers would end up with less or none. Landlessness was an expected outcome of this process and it was assumed that this group of persons would form the labour force and from their wage earnings would satisfy their basic needs, food security included (Swynnerton 1953, p.10).[4]

While not disputing the fact that Kenya's food situation was not static, these policies introduced new dynamics. The question is, what opportunities did they present to the African farmer? And, if any, did this enhance their food security position or not? These issues are addressed in the context of the changes that these policies encouraged or interacted with, namely a shift in farm practices, introduction of market crops and the need to alter the land tenure system.

In spite of the probable good intentions of the Swynnerton Plan, progress towards the demonstration of sound farming methods was limited. In an attempt to introduce a supposedly superior way of doing things, these agricultural policies polarised African farming into progressive farmers and the rest of them who were 'necessarily left behind' as they were perceived not to appreciate these new technologies. In later years, this mode of practice further marginalised smallholders in terms of access to good infrastructure and other support services. This mainly came about because, in addition to a disregard for local knowhow, most of the agricultural extension work was undertaken by staff whose only qualification was allegiance to the colonial administration. These people are reported as having lacked the practical skills to effect change, and the consequent use of coercion in introducing agricultural innovation further prejudiced African attitudes towards agricultural extension programmes (Alila 1977). The colonial extension workers' activities were also hampered by land disputes, a phenomenon that intensified with

the privatization of land, and also one that has since characterized litigation among rural households.[5]

In addition, the plan to raise the productivity of African farmers with the aim of 'improving' their standard of living through raised incomes did not take off. Much of the interest remained with the desire for raw material for industry, the need to generate foreign exchange so as to facilitate imports and the overall aim to make colonial administration self-supporting. Indeed, the general experience with cash crop and subsistence farming throughout colonial Africa suggests that the various territorial governments controlled access to resources to the disadvantage of African agriculture. In Kenya, for instance, the Guaranteed Minimum Return (GMR) credit scheme was only available to settler farmers, and cash cropping was restricted both in terms of who could engage in growing them, and on what scale. It has therefore been argued that the monetisation of the subsistence economy resulted in a progressive breakdown of old structures and their replacement with immature forms of a market economy (Geschiere 1978 citing Meillassoux 1975; Vaughan 1987 citing Raynault 1977).

Thus, the re-organisation of the land tenure system and the subsequent aim to reduce the number of people dependent on the farm did not succeed in turning African agriculture into a full-time occupation. Instead, market regulation, high taxes and poor infrastructure continued to render farming unprofitable. Hay has observed that the withdrawal of resources such as agricultural labour, impoverished rural households because such labour was so lowly paid in the urban sector that they ended up depending on the rural farm for their food needs. Decline in soil fertility, increasing population pressure on the land, and the fragmentation of land holdings in the later years only made it more difficult for Africans to maintain agricultural productivity (Hay 1976). She then concludes that cultivating the land no longer seemed a viable means of acquiring wealth and a number of Africans came to feel that economic security lay in long-term wage employment outside the home. The function of agriculture, in turn, came to be seen essentially as a holding operation - to continue providing the basic elements of subsistence, food for the family and the absentee labourers, and to guarantee a home and a place in the community that could be reactivated when necessary. This reversal of attitude resulted in families producing just what they needed while the rest of the time went into growing cash crops for the market (cf Chapters 4 & 6).

In general, therefore, if there were opportunities that may have been missed in the agricultural policies of the colonial government, these were disguised.[6] For the most part, the food security of African households was jeopardised by the very existence of these policies. And, in moving towards production for the market, households were introduced to a production process that required new skill, knowledge and information, all of which were not rendered appropriately. Hence, if progressive farmers gained command over their food security, the rest of the Africans lost the type of command that they best understood. By the close of the colonial period,

Kenya had already witnessed several food crises, some of which culminated in famines.[7] At the same time, however, colonisation gave way to economic incorporation into (world) markets but with unequal exchanges.[8] Consequently, the independent government sought to free itself of these linkages or at least bring them to negotiable and profitable levels, a position that shaped and continues to shape the country's food policy. On the other hand, the Kenya government has continued to pursue food and agriculture policies that are much in line with what the colonial government had attempted to put in place.[9]

The philosophy behind Kenya's food policy

Sessional Paper No.4 of 1981 on National Food Policy, the first official attempt to directly address Kenya's food security, argues that intensified production is necessary so as: to enable the country maintain a position of broad self-sufficiency in the main foodstuffs without using scarce foreign exchange on food imports, to achieve a calculated degree of security of food supply for each area of the country, and to ensure that these foodstuffs are distributed in such a manner that every member of the population has a nutritionally adequate diet (Kenya SP No.4 1981, p.2; SP No.2 1994, p.4). Hence, at the policy level, food security is equated with national self-sufficiency. This seems to echo the strategy that was adopted at independence in 1963, when it was argued that food self-sufficiency was a prerequisite to self-reliance, a development paradigm that was adopted by most African governments upon re-gaining self-rule. At the time, Kenya's food security was viewed in terms of bringing more land under cultivation, and this was seen as dependent on the availability of labour. It was hence envisioned that

> 'if every person on the land cultivated one extra row, the output of the nation would be substantially larger. If people who are unemployed in cities would return to their land, further increases in output could be achieved. Idleness, whether of land or labour cannot be countenanced in a nation that needs every ear of maize, grain of wheat and pound of cotton ... self-reliance and independence mean the ability and willingness to do things for ourselves' (Kenya SP No. 1 1965, p.24).

One of the major goals was to enable households to gain access to the main factors of production, mainly land. Access to land was planned to be achieved through redistribution and resettling of the displaced and affirming ownership in the former 'African Reserves'.[10] Although this land tenure system was a reversal of colonial policy - to the extent that it aimed at making land available and without setting a minimum size - it borrowed a lot from what had been proposed by the colonial government.[11] The privatisation of land meant that access was hence restricted and,

much as the policy position qualified this by allotting some share of responsibility to society, this was never to be. Privatisation has continued to safeguard the interests of individuals, and because Kenya does not, to date, have a policy that would challenge leaving land idle, this, together with a very skewed distribution, continues to leave much of the high potential land unused.[12]

Although the settlement programme at independence had important psychological effects,[13] over time, the performance of the agricultural sector and food production in particular was found not to depend on access to land alone. Government therefore urged that such access be complemented with the necessary discipline and sacrifice that goes with hard work. Prosperity was perceived to anchor around land development and its doors were described as 'open to only those who prefer to work hard and regularly and also follow the advise of government officers' (Kenya SP No.1 1965). The call for hard and regular work alongside the need to take government policy advise into account were necessitated by an emerging fear that the period of transformation would impact negatively on agricultural production. Other than the movement from large to small scale production, a substantial number of African farmers were assumed to have begun their operations with little previous experience in producing for the market. They also had insufficient working capital to run the farms at a high level of production. In addition, despite having acquired some parts of the former white highlands, government realised that Kenya's greatest but untapped potential lay among smallholders, and most of them inhabited the former non-scheduled areas.[14] There was, therefore, an attempt to aim at projects and programmes that were assumed to create, enhance and sustain the potential to make food available.

Modernising agriculture

Colonial rule in Kenya and the creation of 'African Reserves' in particular, denied these so-called non-scheduled areas access to good infrastructure. It was no wonder then that following the campaign to Africanise the economy, government policy sought to modernize agriculture in these areas. This modernisation was interpreted as intervention in two key areas; influencing the nature of inputs that farmers applied and regulating the marketing of farm produce (Kenya SP No. 1 1965, p.48).[15]

Enabling farmers acquire modern inputs was seen as a means to empower them to embark on production methods that would earn them cash income. And, by developing small scale farming 'into a modern and productive economic activity', government hoped to ensure a better living for millions of farmers, their families and hired labour. Within the food sector, the primary objective was to ensure that adequate supplies were available 'at prices which were reasonably low from the consumers' viewpoint but still sufficiently high to give the efficient producer a fair return' (Kenya Nat. Dev. Plan 1970-74, p.196-235). To this end, hybrid and synthetic

varieties of maize and higher yielding and more rust resistant varieties of seed were introduced, the use of fertilisers and insecticides was recommended and production was expanded on irrigation schemes. In addition, government sought to supply relevant and new technologies for crop production, together with knowledge and skills that would, it was assumed, enable small scale farmers adopt these new technologies. Referred to as the smallholder mechanization programme, this project emphasized the use of locally manufactured ox tools to ease labour bottlenecks and facilitate the introduction of improved agronomic practices for small scale farms. Agricultural research was set to exploit the complementarities between crop and livestock mix with emphasis on labour intensive technologies. Further, in order to improve the purchasing power of rural households and therefore enable them make effective use of improved supply of inputs, existing seasonal and long-term credit systems were planned to be expanded while the Guaranteed Minimum Return credit scheme was set to be replaced by a new system with some degree of subsidy to small scale farmers. Particular emphasis was laid on timely disbursement of seasonal credit for land preparation and for the purchase of seed, fertilisers and other inputs.

On its part, government intended to ensure that adequate inputs were available at the lowest possible prices at the farm-gate and that they were used at the right time and in the correct quantities. Subsidising on farm inputs was intended to maintain profitable input-output ratios and thereby encourage wider usage. In recognition of the need to increase food production through intensification, government planned to increase fertiliser use on food crops. In addition, a steady increase in the supply of improved seed varieties at minimum prices was targeted. Alongside advocating modernised farm enterprises, there was a decision to go beyond the mere concentration of resources on technical aspects of agriculture such as breeding better varieties of crops to teaching farmers how to improve yields through encompassing and emphasising the economics of production. For example, efforts were made to identify more efficient methods of using a range of farm equipment such as alternative cultivation techniques for improved soil and water conservation. The extension programme's effectiveness was revitalised by introducing a new management system based upon regular visits to contact farmers. The effectiveness of this programme was to be measured through the establishment of regular monthly workshops and the designing, supervising and analysing of a comprehensive series of farm level trials. In addition, on-spot training for farmers on the basic principles of crop husbandry, the use of fertilisers and other inputs, crop rotation, on-farm storage for subsistence crops, record keeping and financial management were proposed.

To regulate and indeed consolidate its role in the country's search for food security, government declared that a Maize and Produce Board would be responsible for all imports and exports of this basic food crop.[16] In addition, a grain reserve and monitoring of food supplies within the country were put in place. These measures were based on the assumption that once food is available nationally, the

same could be concluded of the situation at the household level. However, as will become clearer later on, there is a discrepancy between national food supply and the actual food situation at the rural household level.

A search for productivity

One of the major challenges facing Kenya's food policy revolves around land use. As early as the mid-1960s, and even before land constraints became apparent, it was observed that farmers living in areas where staple food crops might yield better returns than conventional cash crops, were nevertheless engaged in planting only enough food to feed themselves, with an assumed margin for safety, while they devoted the rest of their resources to cash crop production. Hence, despite the expectation that such producers would be encouraged to cultivate food surpluses for sale to food-deficit areas, cash cropping became an overriding priority both for them and at the policy level (Kenya 1966-70, p.168). Indeed, the 1989-93 National Development Plan argued that cropping patterns needed to be diversified 'in favour of crops such as tea, coffee and vegetables as they produce much higher incomes and generate considerably more employment per hectare than other crops and livestock activities' (Kenya 1989-93, p.103). While this could be true, these conventional cash crops have not, despite an assumed comparative advantage, resulted in competitive returns. Poor and delayed remuneration have continued to contribute to farmers' incapacity to meet their food needs on the market. And, when commanding markets gets wrapped in uncertainty, most smallholders continue to do the most logical thing, they endeavour to produce their staple food, alongside raising cash incomes. But, in diversifying, they sometimes spread themselves too thin.

By the mid 1970s, agricultural policies in Kenya were grappling with an incongruence between self-sufficiency in staple foodstuffs and production for the export market, amidst a dwindling resource base.[17] In addition, there was, for the first time, a recognition within policy that increased food production was not necessarily an indicator of food security. Instead, it became apparent that, although there was sufficient potential in the country to satisfy the nutritional requirements of the population, there were places and times when food was in short supply. These shortages were attributed to seasonal variations and these were identified as most common among smallholders whose incomes were particularly low. The majority in this group were from the Western and Nyanza Provinces of Kenya. Paradoxically, the food insecure were found both in households that were engaged in production for the export market and those that did not have any cash crop (Kenya Nat. Dev. Plan 1974-78). The policy focus therefore turned to the need for increased productivity as the most viable way to reconcile these competing demands. This culminated in the introduction of a new integrated crop development programme. This programme aimed at intensifying research and extension, providing inputs

including credit to producers, improving roads in the producing areas and establishing additional storage and handling facilities. There was also a plan to ensure that those farmers who produced for export and industry also allowed adequate resources for their own food needs.

National food security strategies: projects and programmes

The Kenya government has defined food security as ensuring that there is an adequate supply of nutritionally balanced foods in all parts of the country, at all times (Kenya SP No.2 1994, p.24).[18] This policy position perceives the search for adequate food as dependent on increasing supplies through production and distribution. Access to land, inputs, and markets is identified as imperative and government efforts are directed towards making this possible. The country's search for adequate food can therefore be broadly categorized into those projects and programmes that relate to what producers receive and how much they are able to sell, those that influence the inputs that farmers use, including land and human capital, those that affect commodities once they are sold by the farmer and before they are purchased by the consumer, and lastly, those emanating from concern over the financial position to deal with such matters as trade and balance of payments.[19]

In this section, I look at some of the key projects and programmes around which Kenya's food policy is currently centred. Noting that the country's food policy operates on many assumptions, I show how this drive largely remains a campaign to make food available, and much less one that would ensure that this food is actually obtainable. I mainly highlight the salient features of each project/programme, its basic assumptions and what each position portends in terms of enabling rural households to command adequate food.[20]

Agricultural inputs

The central objective of the agricultural inputs policy is to ensure that adequate and quality inputs, mainly certified seeds and fertilisers, are available to farmers and that, to the greatest extent possible, these inputs are used at the right time and in the correct quantities (Kenya SP No. 4 1981, p.17; SP No.2 1994, p.17). The basic assumption is that once these technologies are made available, they will be easily utilised, and this will lead to increased output. Indeed, Sessional Paper No.1 of 1986 has argued that since financial returns from fertiliser application are attractive, farmers do not need any other incentive aimed at demonstrating the importance of this input. The Paper supports this with information that in the 1983/84 period, a shilling spent on fertilisers yielded 10 to 14 shillings of revenue to tea and coffee

growers, 4 shillings to wheat growers and 3 shillings to maize growers (Kenya SP No.1 1986, p.80).

In spite of this position, the use of hybrid seeds and fertilisers for food crop production has been generally low, especially among smallholders.[21] The government has attributed this to the non-availability of these inputs as a result of the long distances from farms to retailing shops, price margins that do not allow traders to transport and stock these inputs at a profit, a minimum packaging that is too much for smallholders, and failure by cooperatives to address these challenges on behalf of their membership (Kenya SP No.1 1986, p.81; Kenya SP No.2 1994, p.11). In response to these constraints, and following the removal of direct government subsidy, co-operatives, farmers companies and farmers' groups are permitted to import fertilisers free of duty on behalf of their membership.[22] In addition, the importation of fertilisers and other key agricultural and livestock inputs is given priority in the allocation of foreign exchange; while farm machinery and agro-chemicals are purchased free of Value Added Tax (Kenya SP No.2 1994, p.17-18). In addition, Government intends to continue intervening in non-price areas such as directing extension workers to hold fertiliser use demonstrations, improving soil testing services, packaging and repackaging seed and fertilisers, respectively, in quantities convenient for small-scale farmers, and improving marketing and farm management information so as to assist farmers in making economic decisions.

The question is, however, does the agricultural inputs policy position adequately address the issues that actually regulate and sometimes even constrain rural households from utilising both fertilisers and certified seed? Hebinck & van der Ploeg have argued that choice of technology, farm inputs included, is a function of how the labour process is organised, and this derives from the strategies that farmers devise so as to secure a livelihood (Hebinck & van der Ploeg 1997, p.215). And, as we will see later, in Chapter 6, selection of farm practices is based on much more than a desire for target output.

Credit

It is assumed that in the absence of adequate capital, providing agricultural credit will enable farmers to acquire the necessary inputs for their farm operations. Government policy aims, therefore, to continue providing agricultural credit through the expansion of existing seasonal and long-term credit programmes, but with the intention of moving towards a decentralised agricultural finance system and greater dependence on informal credit (Kenya SP No.2 1994, p.19). Within the food sector, the overall aim is to provide a financial base that would result in intensified production so as to meet consumption requirements (Kenya SP No. 2 1994, p.37).[23]

While this policy sounds all encompassing, actual disbursement shows that agricultural credit is mainly channelled to where it is assumed to be most needed and, more importantly, where it is perceived to provide high returns. Paradoxically, many smallholder operations are not viewed as profit-oriented and an outward and commercial assessment will therefore not classify them as likely to yield high returns. Therefore, although agriculture contributes up to 30 percent of the GDP and more than 60 percent of export earnings, only 10 percent of the total credit extended to the economy goes to this sector.[24] Furthermore, only 20 percent of the Agricultural Finance Cooperation (AFC) loans go to small scale farmers, compared to the 50 percent or more that goes to large scale farms (Kenya SP No.2 1994, p.20). Moreover, existing short-term credit schemes are still not structured in such a way as to easily target smallholders.[25] And, much as current policy now hopes that the liberalisation of the economy will permit a more rational allocation of these resources, this is not obvious from the proposed operations of the Agricultural Development Bank (Kenya SP No.2 1994, p.20).[26]

Whereas this bank is planned to operate with deposits from the public, a decision that makes it attractive to those in favour of reduced government involvement, this facility will not be able to address the needs for which the seasonal credit and related schemes were established. For example, on what basis will a farmer who is hardly self-sufficient borrow and invest a commercial loan in food crop production when h/she is unlikely to realise a surplus for sale? In other words, is credit the solution to creating and restoring the capacity of rural households to be food secure? Drèze has argued that it is unlikely that farmers who are condemned every so often to eating up their productive capital in a desperate struggle for survival can possibly be expected to save, innovate and prosper (Drèze 1990, p.126), to the extent of taking up credit facilities for subsistence purposes. Although these households hardly engage in the arithmetic of what it takes to grow the food that they consume versus purchasing it, their financial position is unlikely to meet the requirements of existing credit schemes. Therefore, such credit may not contribute, directly, towards meeting food needs at the household level.

Research and extension

The Kenya government views the role of research in food security in a diversity of ways, but all of them aim to make food available through production. The main objective is to continue a search for more productive and affordable crop varieties, with a bias towards programmes that would increase yields of already established crops, in addition to breeding for disease and pest resistance varieties, particularly under small holder production systems (Kenya SP No.2 1994, p.21). This policy paper however also points out that 'whilst maize will continue to be the priority

crop for food crop research, increased attention will be given to: drought tolerant crops; oil crops; and environmental protection (Kenya SP No.2 1994, p.21).

The movement towards expanding food choices aims at two things, to reduce the current demand on conventional staples, and to make use of the low potential parts of the country. Since most of the current staple foods cannot do well in low potential areas, promoting drought tolerant crops, such as sorghum, millet, roots and tubers, as alternatives to staple foods such as maize, is anticipated to relieve the possible stress that is being put on high potential land. The agricultural research policy also intends to increase the appeal and shelf-life of food crops so as to increase their distribution potential. To enhance this farther, research is geared to making commercial processing and storage of traditional food crops reliable and remunerative to the producer. It is then assumed that such an expanded choice will stabilise seasonal fluctuations among other disparities in food supply. And, recognising the poor dissemination in research findings, the policy recommends a linkage between farmers and research stations with extension workers as intermediaries - the major aim being to assist farmers in planning and budgeting for their farm activities (Kenya SP No.2 1994, p.24).

In spite of these fairly elaborate plans, food crop research has remained limited. For example, although maize accounts for 23 percent of the total farmland and 13 percent of the value of marketed output, it receives only 8 percent of the research funds (Kenya SP No.2 1994, p.39). Moreover, there is an assumption within this policy that once higher yields are assured and both choice and storage are expanded, food security will ensue. While this is possible in per capita terms, it may not necessarily offer the same opportunities for those rural households already engaged in the cultivation of their own food, partly because they cannot afford it on the market. Furthermore, we cannot take it for granted that providing alternative foods will widen the scope for everybody and, in particular, for those most in need.

Marketing and distribution

Prior to market liberalisation, food prices in Kenya tended to favour the consumer at the expense of the producer. During this period, it was argued that if prices were to be left to be determined by demand and supply, food shortages were likely to be a disincentive to those farmers engaged in the production of other crops for export and cash income, unless their subsistence needs were adequately guaranteed. But, by regulating prices so as to make food available to those not engaged in food cultivation, mainly urban dwellers, farmers found themselves victims of a marketing structure that compelled them to pay higher prices for goods essential for their farm operations while at the same time receiving steadily declining returns for their produce.[27]

The current policy, therefore, seems to be a reversal of earlier concerns, with a major shift towards creating incentives for the producer. This policy argues that whether or not the country achieves the set rates of growth in food production necessary to achieve and maintain a position of broad self-sufficiency in major food crops will depend, to a major extent, on the farm-level profitability in producing these crops. Therèfore, to protect producers from extreme fluctuations in returns, minimum (floor) prices are set (for maize, wheat, rice and sugar-cane), based largely on import parities (Kenya SP No.4 1994, p.15). The assumption here is that once profits are apparent, farmers will invest in food crop production. This is expected to be enhanced by the removal of restrictions in grain movement, the availability of marketing information so as to guide farmers, traders and consumers in making informed decisions, and the maintenance of rural roads so as to improve and facilitate the marketing and distribution of food (Kenya SP No.2 1994, p.16-17).

Thus, government policy perceives the role of efficient marketing in food security at two levels. A working market can be used as an incentive to producers, who would then put more of their land under food crops or, an efficient distribution system will guarantee the availability of food on the market. While these are logical arrangements, they are based on assumptions, several of which disregard the reality on the ground. For instance, there is little of a competitive outlet for farm produce. In many parts of the country, the distances to the National Cereals and Produce Board (NCPB) stores and collection centres are prohibitive. Therefore, although government has put in place a provision for floor prices for major food crops, including maize, farmers are not able to resort to the NCPB as an alternative market. In 1995 for example, the NCPB was unable to intervene because it lacked funds to purchase maize from farmers. As a result, farmers in Kitale and other major maize growing regions were forced to sell way below production costs, to middlemen, as the alternative was to let the crop rot in the fields. Besides, the selling patterns of most households may not find the NCPB an attractive outlet as most of these sales are spontaneous. Hence, among smallholders, maize continues to be sold in rural markets where prices are necessarily subjected to demand and supply (Chapter 1). What role, then, is marketing and distribution likely to play with regard to the food security of rural households? As is evident in Chapter 7, there is a difference between making food available through efficient distribution mechanisms and 'putting it on the table'.

Strategic reserves

Kenya's current storage capacity for strategic reserves is estimated at 19.6 million bags spread over several sites covering production areas, high consumption areas and food deficit areas (Kenya Nat. Dev. Plan 1994-96, p.114).[28] Prior to the current reforms, grain procurement and storage was a government monopoly under the

NCPB. It is, however, proposed that once commodity dealers take over completely, the NCPB will be involved only in the procurement and maintenance of strategic reserves of essential cereals (Kenya SP No.2 1994, p.16-17).[29] The role of the NCPB will hence be limited to that of a 'buyer and seller of last resort' with the sole purpose of maintaining strategic reserves. As a food security strategy, these stocks are meant to enable government to stabilise prices in case of drastic fluctuations in supply versus demand.

Actual practice, however, reveals that this has not been realised. These grain reserves are costly to maintain, a cost that is passed on to the consumer, and in turn, one that exacerbates the food situation at a time when people are most in need (cf Chapter 1). In addition, the actual amount of stocks kept has not been commensurate with the rise in demand and these stocks have therefore not been able to take care of the lead time required before imports can be secured. Furthermore, the inefficiencies that have characterised the management of these reserves have resulted in these stocks not playing their role.[30] The physical location of these stores relative to major sources of food supply and anticipated need has been a subject of much debate, with suggestions that some of the decisions defeat the purpose of holding these reserves. In some locations these stocks are subject to their being used for political gain.[31]

But, even in the absence of the above concerns, the assumptions underlying the need to hold strategic reserves (be it in stocks or in cash), may not provide a similar sense of security at the household level. Given that these reserves are only meant to stabilise markets, households have to be ready to afford this food, once it is on the market. Hence, although national reserves may provide an alternative source of food, this does not guarantee that individual households will be able to obtain this food.

Monitoring and early warning

According to government policy, strategic reserves are necessary owing to vagaries of weather (Kenya Nat. Dev. Plan 1994-96, p.114). The Ministry of Planning and National Development (MoPND) therefore coordinates the efforts of other government departments in the collection, processing and dissemination of data and information on the state of food reserves, and the factors likely to affect the adequacy and distribution of these stocks. This Ministry also oversees the management of strategic food reserves for purposes of market stabilisation. When appropriate or optimum levels are threatened, signals are sent to government (Kenya Nat. Dev. Plan 1994-96, p.115).[32]

The early warning programme is based on the assumption that food insecurity occurs from a lack of information that would bring about early intervention. The National Food and Nutrition Secretariat (NFNS) within the Ministry of Planning and National Development therefore aims to undertake long-term policy analysis and to

develop food security policies and strategies for use in national planning and decision-making (Kenya SP No.2 1994, p.32-33). Some of the information that is considered important relates to signals that could result either in shortages or excess supply of major food commodities. This is obtained from data on input availability, use and distribution difficulties; land preparation and planting; monthly weather and crop performance; progress of harvesting, marketing and stock accumulation; and local supply as relates to farm-gate and market prices of the main food crops (Kenya SP No.2 1994, p.46-47; Kenya Nat. Dev. Plan 1994-96, p.114).[33]

The nature of the information sought points towards a food policy that operates on a balance sheet, consisting of supply versus demand. While this could guide national food concerns, it takes for granted such possibilities as unequal distribution of resources and as such, it may not capture situations as they exist at the household level. Even the Rural Household Surveys that were conducted under the auspices of the Central Bureau of Statistics and which could have easily brought out some of these disparities, fell short of this possibility because their scope was limited, mainly covering area under crop, unit outputs and food budgets. The dilemma therefore is that, much as early warning could lead to political preparedness, it may not trigger the right interventions, mainly those that can address the concerns of affected individuals. And, since this data is based on certain assumptions, mainly that food security derives from cultivation, such information may not help in identifying the complexities that otherwise surround the search for food. For instance, during the 1984 drought in Kenya, early warning played no significant role because food shortages did not become apparent until after the rains failed (Drèze 1990, p.159). And, although the government moved (swiftly) to avert a crisis, this was a matter of political concern rather than their having applied predictive information. Even then, government action generally went only as far as making food available on the (urban) market while the rest remained the responsibility of individual household members to fulfil.

Nutrition and dietary practices

Food insecurity at the household level is acknowledged, within Kenya's food policy, as a challenge that has continued to co-exist with policies that are aimed at eliminating it. Household food insecurity is seen as pertaining to poor food intake, and this is viewed as arising from a lack of access to adequate food, due to inequalities in the distribution of purchasing power and the existence of seasonal but localised food shortages (Kenya SP No.2 1994, p.27).

Government then aims to continue encouraging the production and consumption of high nutrition crops such as beans, peas and groundnuts. In addition, it aims to collect and analyse information on the nutritional status of the population as a basis for determining programmes that could eliminate specific nutritional deficiencies.

Some of the programmes already identified include the evaluation of the cost effectiveness of the school milk feeding programme and identification of measures to improve the nutritional status of children; expansion of the government's food relief programme to cover the large number of rural and urban families adversely affected by food shortages; expansion of the national nutrition education programmes by increasing the number of nutrition teachers; designing government sponsored programmes for food fortification; close monitoring of the quality of prepacked and processed foods; improvement in home economics by laying emphasis on nutritional education, and continuing surveys and monitoring of the nutritional status of the population (Kenya SP No.2 1994, p.48-49). In addition, it is assumed that improvement in the storage methods aimed at reducing post-harvest losses and provision of emergency food relief, and, in particular, the implementation of the food for work programmes for the rural poor and other vulnerable groups, will contribute to meeting the food needs of these households (Kenya SP No.2 1994, p.24-25).[34]

Whereas Kenya's food policy framework seems to interpret household level food security concerns in terms of poor intake obtaining from seasonality, lack of purchasing power and inadequate nutritional knowledge, this does not capture situations where food insecurity may exist in spite of adequate nutritional knowledge and a relative ability to pay. Besides, the kind of measures that are suggested within this framework give priority to direct intervention, which may not restore the capability to carry on. Overall, this food policy can be described as supply-oriented. I will now turn to briefly look at how well the country has balanced this supply with national demand. This discussion will centre on output levels for maize, relative to periods when Kenya has experienced considerable food shortages, notably 1965, 1967, 1974, 1980, 1984, 1992, 1994, 1995 and 1996.[35]

National level food supply trends[36]

On average, acreage under maize has been on the increase, rising from 447,600 hectares in 1963 to over one million hectares in 1998. This increase has however also been characterised by fluctuations, some of the most remarkable being in 1963/64, 1965/66, 1973/74, 1976/77, 1978/79, 1980/81, 1983/84 and 1985/86. In some cases, these fluctuations have been accompanied by a corresponding effect on output.[37] The question therefore is, how adequately has the country's food policy addressed these challenges?

In 1965, Kenya experienced the first post-independence food shortages. These were attributed to a domestic production that was substantially below normal consumption requirements, primarily as a result of a drought that affected most parts of the country, compounded by a shortfall in the 1964 commercial maize crop and failure to move quickly enough to import adequate supplies from overseas

(Kenya Nat. Dev. Plan 1966-70, p.168). Although linked to drought and a subsequent lower than normal harvest, the 1965 food shortages resulted from much more. For example, the harvest of 1.56 million bags in 1965 was 10,000 bags over that of 1964 and, although there was a drop in acreage between 1963 and 1964, this improved in 1965 (Figures 3.1 & 3.2). As we will see in Chapter 4, much of these shortages were a result of restrictions in the movement of maize, than a scarcity in supply.[38]

Similarly, despite having a record area under maize for that decade with equally high sales and subsequent exports, food shortages were again reported in 1967. These were attributed to poor weather, mainly excessive rain and hailstones. The country, however, picked up the following year (1968) with considerable surpluses and, the amount of maize released on the market was estimated at 3,860,000 bags, compared to 2,740,000 bags in 1967 (Figure 3.4). This increase was attributed to the entry of African farmers into commercial farming, a research breakthrough at Kitale Agricultural Research Station regarding a maize variety that would, under like conditions, improve yields by 30 percent, and the promotion of maize as a raw material for industry. Unfortunately, the bumper harvest of 1968 resulted in the lowering of producer prices, a decision that gave way to a decline in output during the 1969 season.

Therefore, although maize output increased during the late 1960s and early 1970s following the introduction of hybrid seed, government intervention proved to be a disincentive to the producer. Not too long after this, the drought of the 1973/74 period gave way to severe food shortages. The amount of maize on the market dropped by over 17 percent and exports dropped by 73 percent (Figure 3.4). However, there was no significant increase in maize imports into the country between 1972 and 1975. In 1974 for instance, only 8,000 bags of maize were imported, and this was just 12 percent over the 1973 imports (Figure 3.3). Failure by government to intervene during these shortages was attributed to the 1974 world oil crisis that made imports impossible.[39]

On average, acreage under maize increased between 1975 and 1976, with comparable increases in sales and exports (Figures 3.1; 3.3 & 3.4). However, government intervention in maize marketing again prompted food shortages in 1980. Following the bumper crop of 1976/77 that left the NCPB with full stores, and policy restrictions on the movement of maize that made it impossible for the private trade to absorb surpluses on-farm, there was a decline in acreage under maize (Figure 3.1). The decline in area under maize was reinforced by a shortage of fertilisers, the discontinuation of the Guaranteed Minimum Return credit scheme, and the adverse weather of the 1979/80 season (Kenya Nat. Dev. Plan 1984-88).[40] Following these shortages, 850,000 bags of maize were imported in 1980, in addition to 3.56 million bags in 1979 (Figure 3.3).[41] Therefore, unlike the 1974 food shortages, this time there was food on the market for those who had the means to access it. Nevertheless, these shortages challenged the food needs of many at the rural household level (cf Chapter 5).

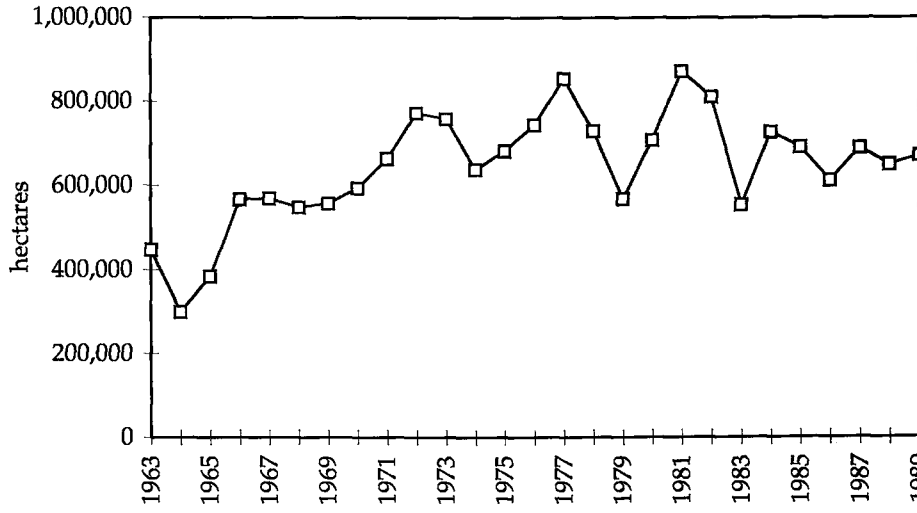


Figure 3.1 Area under maize in Kenya, 1963-1989
Source: Compiled from Statistical Abstracts, Economic Surveys and other Country Records

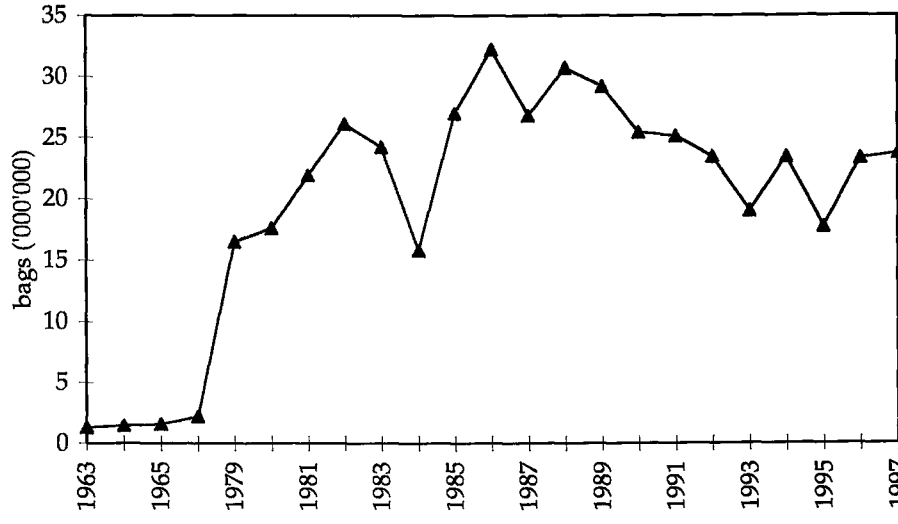


Figure 3.2 National maize output, 1963-1997
Source: Compiled from Statistical Abstracts, Economic Surveys and other Country Records

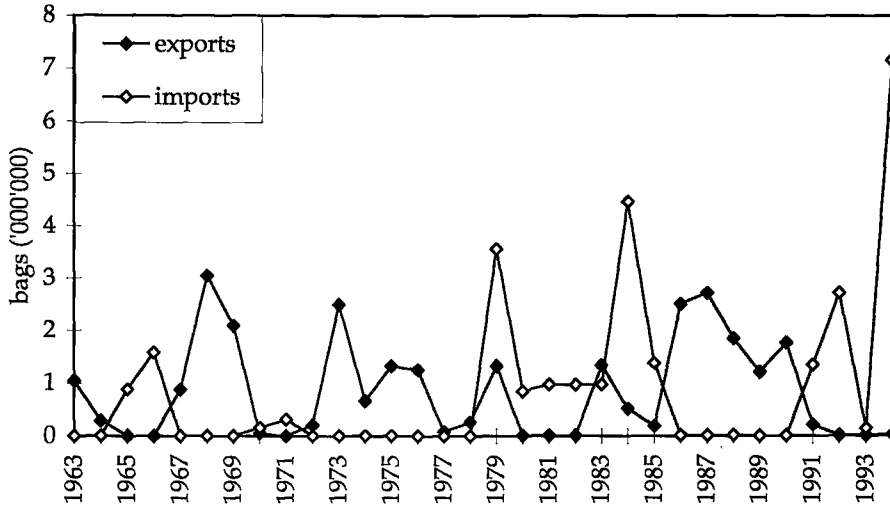


Figure 3.3 A comparison between maize exports and imports, 1963-1994
Source: Compiled from Statistical Abstracts, Economic Surveys and other Country Records

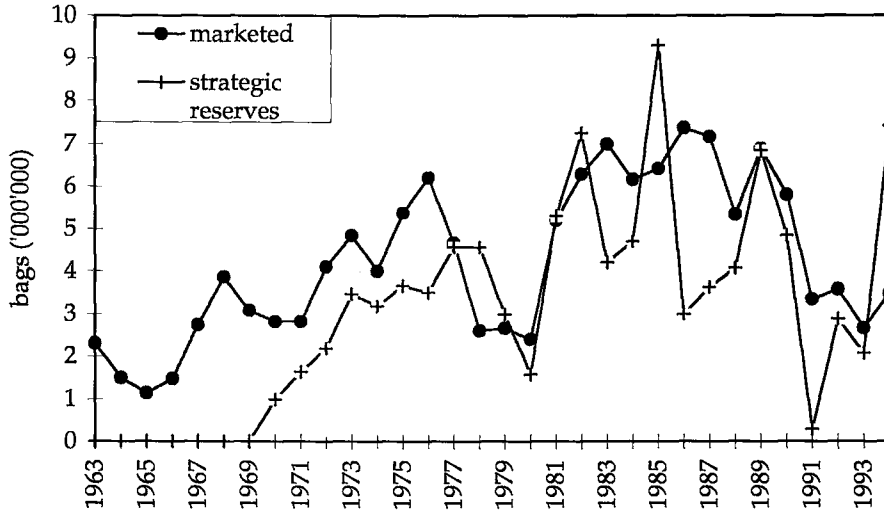


Figure 3.4 Amount of maize marketed and what is held as strategic reserves, 1963-1994
Source: Compiled from Statistical Abstracts, Economic Surveys and other Country Records

However, the interval between national food shortages started narrowing for Kenya. In 1984, the country again experienced what has been described as the worst drought in 50 years (Kenya SP No.4 1994, p.6; Drèze 1990, p.159). Maize output dropped from 24.2 million bags in 1983 to a mere 15.8 million in 1984, and the country's overall growth in agriculture recorded a negative rate of 3.9 percent (Figure 3.2). In spite of this drought, the amount of maize released on the market did not vary much from that of previous years and, although some maize was exported, a substantial amount was also imported (Figures 3.3 & 3.4). The apparent stability in supplies did not, however, enable some, at the rural household level, to meet their food needs (cf Chapters 5, 6 & 7).

Drèze has observed that, despite the fact that government involved private traders in the distribution of food for sale following the 1984 drought, restrictions in movement and price controls left some parts of the country poorly served (Drèze 1990, p.159). He gives the example of Samburu District where traders declined to stock maize for lack of profits between the costs of transportation and set price ceilings. And, whenever the food was available, the poor suffered disproportionately as they lacked the money with which to purchase in bulk.[42]

Although maize production fluctuated between 1985 and 1989, the 1990s have been characterised by relatively low output, regular imports and publicly acknowledged threats of famine (Figures 3.2 3.3 & 3.4). This turn of events has been attributed to poor weather, high costs of farm inputs following the devaluation of the Kenyan currency and associated reforms, some of which prompted considerable changes in the priority allocation of domestic resources. And a freeze on donor aid is believed to have curtailed imports of farm inputs and food to replenish stocks (Kenya SP No.2 1994).[43] This situation is still far from repaired. While maize output has averaged about 22 million bags in the 1990s, annual demand stands at about 33 million and it is estimated that this will rise farther by the turn of the century (Kenya Nat. Dev. Plan 1994-96).

At the policy level, however, the delay in transforming the country's food policy into food security for all is explained in terms of low aggregate output resulting from a sharp decline in the production of maize; a population growth that absorbs increases in food production thereby preventing improvement in per capita nutritional intake; seasonal fluctuations in supply; a decline in real terms of public investment in agriculture including investments in roads, research, extension and similar infrastructural support and services necessary to give farmers the motivation to invest in food production; and political instability in neighbouring countries which has brought an exodus of refugees that has continued to put considerable pressure on available food supplies (Kenya SP No.2 1994, p.2-30; Kenya Nat. Dev. Plan 1997-2001, p.51).[44]

However, without down playing some of the major challenges that have constrained Kenya's food policy, indications are that even if this policy position were to be fully functional, making food available will not necessarily guarantee that

this food is also accessible to all. Hence, there is a need to understand what else comes into play during the search for adequate food, and how this differs from what government policy perceives as the steps towards ensuring that there is adequate food for all. In this study, I focus on how everyday practices at the rural household level interact with these macro level processes and concerns.

From food policy to food security

> 'Agriculture will have to provide food security for a population of almost 35 million in 2000; generate farm family incomes that grow by at least 5 percent a year for the next 15 years; absorb new farm workers at the rate of over 3 percent a year with rising productivity; supply export earnings by 2000; and stimulate the growth of productive off-farm activities in the rural areas, so that off-farm jobs can grow at 3.5 to 5.0 percent a year' (Kenya SP No. 1 1986, p.62).

This chapter aimed to highlight how food security is conceptualised at the policy level, and how the search for adequate food is therefore perceived. The foregoing discussions have indicated that Kenya's food policy is supply-based, and mainly oriented towards meeting the food needs of the consumer - who is often the urban dweller or those with the economic ability to buy - while taking for granted the food security needs of smallholders. Hence, the various projects and programmes within which the food policy framework is conceptualised aim at making food available through increased production and subsequent distribution of these supplies to all parts of the country. This policy position assumes that adequate food derives from engaging in a modernised production and distribution system. As such, food security is linked to ability to use recommended agricultural inputs, maintenance of a buffer stock, access to early warning systems, and the marketing and distribution of these supplies. However, the assumptions underlying equating food security with making food available pose several challenges to the search for adequate food.

The general hypothesis that agriculture is capable of enabling the country meet its food needs, in addition to providing a source of income, forms the basis for the challenges that dominate Kenya's food policy. Although emphasis is on national self-sufficiency with the assumption that households that find their comparative advantage elsewhere can acquire their food on the market, it is not clear how these incomes will be raised and whether they will be sufficient to accommodate markets as a source of food. Nevertheless, whether rural households are able to obtain adequate food will depend on what resources are at their disposal and much more importantly, how they mobilise these resources for purposes of meeting their food needs.

The rest of the chapters in this thesis centre on what takes place at the rural household level during the search for food. I mainly focus on the processes that

contribute to shaping food security strategies, the choices that households engage in and the contexts in which these choices are made. The aim is to understand what actually goes on, and how variations in the meanings and practices that dominate the search for adequate food come to determine the food security position at the rural household level. Chapter 4 places this discussion in the context of the changes that have taken place among the Gusii.

Notes

1. Sessional Paper No.10 of 1965 defines African Socialism as a term describing an African political and economic system that is positively African, not being imported from any country or being a blueprint of any foreign ideology but capable of incorporating useful and compatible techniques from whatever source. The principal conditions that this system must satisfy are that, it must draw on the best of African traditions; it must be adaptable to new and rapidly changing circumstances; and it must not rest for its success on a satellite relationship with any other country or group of countries (Kenya SP No.10 1965, p.2-3).

2. This discussion is based on government documents: the Five Year National Development Plans, various Sessional Papers and other documents intended to articulate government policy. Discussions centre on the implications of Kenya's food policy vis-à-vis smallholders. This category of Kenyans constitute 2.7 million holdings, they occupy 60 percent of the arable land and they account for 75 percent of the agricultural produce (Kenya Nat. Dev. Plan 1994-98).

3. Although the Swynnerton Plan recommended that 'the people must not put into a single basket all their eggs which may crack on the rocks of depression, pests or diseases, or on their own apathy or general inability to cope with a difficult crop', mixed farming was seen as only necessary until such a time that the people attained sufficient returns from cash crops (Swynnerton 1953, p.13).

4. In advocating these changes, the Swynnerton Plan argued that 'sound agricultural development was dependent upon a system of land tenure which would make available to the African farmer a unit of land and a system of farming whose production would support his family at a level, taking into account perquisites derived from the farm, comparable with other occupations. An indefeasible title would then encourage the farmer to invest his labour and profits into the development of his farm and this would also enable him to offer the title as security against financial credit' (Swynnerton 1953, p.9).

5. See for example Kanyinga 1997.

6. Households that had access to a cash income progressed in terms of being able to invest in cash cropping in the later part of the colonial period.

7. It is for example argued that, while colonial rule may have acted to alleviate hunger during food crises, other evidence shows that their policies interfered with existing socio-economic ties which were, until then, effective in enabling victims of hunger overcome their

plight. Herlehy has observed that the first severe famine to strike the Mijikenda during this century was caused in part by the British colonial interference in the expansion of Mijikenda agriculture. Following a rebellion against colonial demands for labour in coastal plantations, public works projects and military forces, the colonial administration imposed a fine and also forced the people to vacate rich farming areas, in an attempt to suppress this revolt. This dislocation prevented most families from cultivating their fields and in order to pay the fine, many of them sold their assets, mainly livestock and grain (Herlehy 1984). See also Chapter 4.

8. Although Rimmer (1982) has argued that the incorporation into world markets that began during colonial rule is what currently independent countries in Africa are clamouring for, this argument is oblivious of obvious differences.

9. See Nyangito & Kimenye 1995.

10. In order to address the social, economic and political problems arising from the juxtaposition of the prosperous white highlands and overcrowded, economically deprived peasant farming areas, government embarked on a policy that would enable African farmers to purchase European owned land. One of these was the 'one million acres', a programme that involved the purchase of European owned mixed farming land adjacent to densely populated African areas. These land purchases were secured through UK loans and grants. The purchased land was then divided into small holdings and African farmers were settled on it (KANU Manifesto 1963:6 in Kenya SP No.1 of 1965, p.17-18). Similarly, several parallel programmes to assist Africans acquire land intact in the former scheduled areas were planned as a way of increasing the country's agricultural output. Some of these farms, now in the hands of Kenyans, have emerged as national granaries. These programmes included the Compassionate Farms and Assisted Owners Scheme financed by the British government, and loans made available by the Land and Agricultural Bank of Kenya (Land Bank) and supplemented by the Agricultural Finance Cooperation loans for loose assets. Here, farms changed hands on a willing buyer willing seller basis. As of 31st December 1965, about 550,000 acres in the former scheduled areas had come into the hands of Africans (Kenya Nat. Dev. Plan 1966-70). In addition, land consolidation, adjudication and registration were pursued as crucial programmes for the former African areas. These measures were favoured as ways of enabling small holders further improve and protect their land. One of the high ranking advantages of land registration was ability to benefit from existing development loans. These considerations were also expected to result in increased productivity, reduced land litigation, desirable investment incentives, and raised employment opportunities.

11. For example, it was argued that 'African traditions cannot be carried over indiscriminately to a modern, monetary economy. The need to develop and invest requires credit and a credit economy rests heavily on a system of land titles and their registration. The ownership of land must therefore be made more definite and explicit if land consolidation and development are to be fully successful. It does not follow, however, that society will also give up its stake in how resources are used. Indeed, it is a fundamental characteristic of African Socialism that society has a duty to plan, guide and control the uses of all productive resources' (Kenya SP No.1 1965, p.10-11).

12. It is reported that considerable tracts of land are either idle or under-utilised in the Rift Valley and Coast Provinces (Kenya SP No.2 1994, p.12). It is even widely believed that much of the land that now lies idle is what has been allocated to individuals who, unlike the enthusiastic smallholders, have little or no immediate interest (and capacity) to make productive use of this land. Some of these allocations followed the privatisation of what used to be State Farms, many of which were, until then, used for food crop production. Whereas there are measures that could indirectly induce the new owners to put this land into productive use, these people's comparative advantage tends to lie elsewhere.

13. To the landless Africans, this programme demonstrated the government's determination and ability to open up new opportunities in the once forbidden areas, a problem that newly democratised states like Zimbabwe and South Africa are still grappling with.

14. This refers to the former 'African Reserves' mainly consisting of the areas where land alienation did not take place and as such, where there was no European settlement. In the 1960s, 80 percent of the rural population inhabited the former 'African Reserves', most of the agricultural jobs (estimated at 400,000) were found within this sector and the areas contained some of Kenya's high potential agricultural land (Kenya Nat. Dev. plan 1966-70). Small farms in Kenya now include the former non-scheduled areas, settlement schemes, irrigation schemes, and areas of illegal settlement.

15. In principal, policies aimed at achieving Africanisation were those regarded as consistent with growth and development. The general assumption was that this would result in higher incomes (Kenya SP No. 1 1965, p.27-30). Growth in agriculture was also seen as synonymous with rural development (Alila & Omosa 1996). However, success towards correcting these rural disparities is debatable (Omosa 1993).

16. This Board was later to be named the National Cereals and Produce Board (NCPB). See Bates 1983 and Hebinck 1990 for a historical account and a critique on performance.

17. Kenya's total land area is 56.9 million hectares. Although slightly over 90 percent of this land is agriculturally viable, only 10 million hectares (17%) is of high to medium potential and, about 60 percent of this high to medium potential land is devoted to crop and dairy production (Kenya Nat. Dev. Plan 1994-96, p.113).

18. Both the World Bank and FAO have similarly defined food security as ensuring that all people at all times have both physical and economic access to the basic food they need (FAO) for an active, healthy life (World Bank). World Bank 1988; FAO 1985.

19. See World Bank 1986. Although I have limited this chapter to food policies, there is a recognition that other non-agriculture related policies are relevant.

20. This chapter limits itself to what Kenya's food policy position means to rural households. The aim is to bring out some of the limitations in the way the search for food has been conceptualised at policy level. The chapter is therefore not aimed at assessing the performance of the various projects and programmes, although I allude to this from time to time. Some of the studies that have assessed country specific food policies include Meilink 1985; Rukuni *et al* 1989; Geier 1995; Timmer & Falcon 1983; Engberg-Pedersen *et al* 1996;

Lewa & Hubbard 1995; Braun *et al* 1992; Braun & Kennedy 1994; Delgado 1995.

21. Certified seed application is estimated at only 50 percent (Kenya SP No.2 1994, p.11).

22. The current performance of these co-operatives and unions does not, however, demonstrate a capacity to render such a service without exploiting the farmer even more, through inefficiencies. Besides, the duty waiver on importation of fertilisers is unlikely to make a difference to smallholders, many of whom do not belong to formally organised groups. At the national level, however, the agricultural inputs policy may attract commercial farmers into investing in food production. Kenya relies largely on commercial (60%) and aid (40%) fertiliser imports, mainly from the USA, Europe and the Middle East. During the 1994-96 plan period, fertiliser imports ranged between 196,000 and 244,000 tonnes, although demand was estimated at 237,000 to 253,000 tonnes.

23. Major suppliers of credit to the agricultural sector include, commercial banks, non-bank financial institutions, the Agricultural Finance Cooperation, the Cooperative Bank, the Cooperative Movement, and in recent years, crop marketing and processing parastatals and to a limited extent, a variety of non-governmental organisations (Kenya Nat. Dev. Plan 1994-96, p.136).

24. This proportion of government expenditure to agriculture was 5 percent in 1993-96 and about 8 percent in the 1980-87 period (Kenya Dev. Plan 1994-96).

25. The concern over making it possible for smallholders to utilise existing credit schemes dates back to the colonial period when these farmers were totally excluded. Then, beneficiaries received advance money to cover the costs of purchased inputs for crop production. In case of a certified crop failure, this amount was waived in part or in full. Although this facility was extended to smallholders at independence, it remained restricted. Beneficiaries have to put no less than 10 acres of land under maize/wheat and they have to show a title indicating that they own the land on which these crops stand. Typified by low repayment due to poor weather and low yields, the Guaranteed Minimum Return Credit Scheme was discontinued in 1979 and replaced with the Seasonal Crop Credit Scheme in 1980 (Kenya SP no.2 1994, p.37; Kanyinga 1997).

26. This will be different from the current system where the Agricultural Finance Cooperation depends on the Treasury for funds. Given that most of the AFC loans are not serviced, government has continued to incur heavy losses, much of it a subsidy to the rich and powerful.

27. This policy used the rural agricultural producer to subsidise the low wages offered to urban workers. See also Lewa & Hubbard 1995; Meilink 1985.

28. Some of these sites include silos and cyprus bins in Moi's Bridge, Nakuru, Eldoret, Narok, Mau Narok (Rift Valley Province), Kisumu (Nyanza Province), Bungoma (Western Province), and Nairobi. These locations have a combined capacity of 4.8 million bags. The rest of the stocks (14.8 million bags) are in stores nationwide (Kenya Nat. Dev. Plan 1994-96, p.126).

29. And, it is planned that with training and financial assistance, commodity dealers will take over the storage, marketing and distribution of cereals from the National Cereals and Produce Board (NCPB). It is also stated that to ensure food security, the strategic grain reserves will be supplemented with a foreign exchange reserve for emergency maize imports for purposes of stabilising markets (Kenya SP No.2 1994, p.16-17).

30. For example, in 1997, newspaper reports suggested that, in spite of a looming food crisis, the NCPB stores were empty, while no concrete plans were in place for food imports. See Daily Nation Editorial, Friday November 7, 1997. cf Bates' analysis of the 1984/85 famine (Bates 1983, p.109-115).

31. Much of the debate on how public food stocks should be distributed centres around identifying the food needy. See Chapter 7 for a detailed discussion on the complexities surrounding 'proper' identification of the food needy.

32. In order to safeguard domestic supplies, government policy states that food exports will be allowed only when domestic supplies are assured for the foreseeable future. And, to protect the interests of the farming community, food imports are meant to be sanctioned only when there is a need to meet confirmed deficits of staple foods which cannot be met from domestic stocks (Kenya SP No.2 1994, p.26). It is, however, questionable how well such information is used to avert food shortages. See for example Buchanan-Smith *et al* 1994.

33. There are several other committees engaged in food policy analysis. These include the Food and Agricultural Policy Analysis (FAPA) within the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Marketing; the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS); the Department of Resource Surveys and Remote Sensing; and the Inter-Ministerial Crop Forecasting Committee.

34. These vulnerable groups are identified as school age children, the disabled, lactating mothers in food deficit areas, street urchins and families affected by drought and other calamities (Kenya SP no.2 1994, p. 15). This, unfortunately, excludes others who may also be as needy even though they reside in regions that are classified as high potential. In actual fact, it need not take a natural disaster to be food insecure.

35. The proportion of maize in total quantity of calories obtained from staples (cereals, pulses and roots) in rural areas is estimated at 53 percent (Kenya, Central Bureau of Statistics 1981). Although the Ministry of Agriculture in Kisii seems to follow similar guidelines in declaring the district as food secure (cf Chapter 1), the demand for maize in Kisii, both in terms of actual intake and calorie requirements, could be much higher partly because both pulses and roots are less utilised, if at all (cf Chapters 5 & 7).

36. Years for which data was not available have been excluded and fluctuations that cover these periods are therefore not discussed. While these data (and those in Chapter 4) were gathered with the utmost care, it is possible that there will be discrepancies arising from the difficulties of ascertaining the number of farmers and ability to capture farm activities. Moreover, as is the case throughout the World, statistics serve more than one purpose.

37. Sometimes, harvests did not correspond with fluctuations in acreage due to variations in agronomic practices and weather patterns, among other reasons.

38. In order to address these shortages, the Kenya government imported maize on a twenty year loan from the United States of America. And, turning to production, government urged for improvement in yields.

39. The general crisis in the economy is also reflected in the fact that agriculture recorded a growth rate of -0.2 in 1974, compared to 4.4 in 1973 (Onjala, 1995).

40. See also Bates 1989, p.109.

41. Maize imports were meagre between 1972 and 1978.

42. See also Case Studies, Chapters 5, 6 & 7.

43. This set in around 1991 when the threat to freeze aid was first effected.

44. Although Figure 3.3 indicates that there were years when Kenya exported maize and others when the country did not import any grain, it is argued that these exports, notably in the 1970s and 1980s were only periodic. Instead, the FAO Household Food Security Index now rates Kenya as one of the most food-insecure developing countries, placing it 51st out of 61 low-income food deficit countries (Famine and Early Warning Systems Report, FEWS, June 27, 1996).

CHAPTER 4

AGRARIAN CHANGE IN KISII AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON FOOD SECURITY

In addition to the suggestion that food security flows from a network of relations, I have argued that the functioning of these relations needs to be put in perspective (Chapters 1 and 2). This includes looking at what has taken place over time, and in particular, those changes pertaining to access and utilisation of major factors of production. This chapter aims, therefore, to place the study in a historical perspective. Several agricultural interventions, transitions and transformations that took place among the Gusii will be traced to the points at which they started impacting on food security. The primary aim is to capture shifts in the District's food position by highlighting changes in sources of food and, in particular, the weakening of cultivation as a source of food and, the challenges that surround markets as an emerging alternative.

The overall assumption is that once the Gusii entered commodity markets, and more such links were established, their food needs, until then secured largely through cultivating land, faced new challenges. How the Gusii have struggled with and even accommodated emerging contradictions in securing adequate food, is the central concern. I therefore focus on how they have interacted with change, how they have perceived and applied these processes, and the continuities, discontinuities and meanings that result from these interactions. Discussions are based on data from national archives, District agricultural records, life history accounts and scientific sources.

Farming, a way of life

In the days before colonial rule, the way of life of the Gusii centred around food production. Land use was governed by two major enterprises, food staples and cattle (Uchendu & Anthony 1975, p.27). Cattle and goats were a source of accumulation and their ownership brought great prestige.[1] The importance of cattle among the Gusii has, however, diminished over the years. Initially, this was brought about by a reduction in numbers as a result of epidemics, together with government restrictions on stocks and the abolition of *gesarate* - the Gusii cattle villages - in 1912 (see Note 8). In later years, this was compounded by a shortage of grazing lands and labour. The latter first came about when most of the young men who once herded livestock increasingly moved out to seek employment on European plantations and in urban centres. As a result, women started milking cows, a task that they had never engaged in before (Vine & Vine 1966, p.10).

A distinction was made between arable lands and communal grazing lands. Rights to land were protected and acknowledged through taking occupation and strict

ownership never arose. The rule, as enforced by lineage elders, was to make idle land available to anyone who needed it. Independent living for adult young men started with inheriting a piece of land from their father. The size of the inheritance was dependent on the father's endowment and subsequently on the number of male children to an individual wife. The timing of when one could inherit land was dependent on marriage, a sign of having entered adulthood. The land became a source of livelihood and the basis of an individual's boundaries and authority. Basic among these responsibilities was having to provide for oneself and dependants. Similarly, women gained access to land and related esteem through marriage (Field Interviews, 1995-97).

Children were born and raised in farming and their roles were defined along the lines of sex and age. While this way of life was never static, contacts with the 'external' world facilitated more rapid change in Gusii agriculture and general livelihoods. Hence, much of the change that has taken place in the food security patterns of rural households is attributed to incorporation into the market economy. But, as we will see from Aminga's account below, production for subsistence has co-existed with growing crops for the market, and movement into off-farm employment has not reduced the role of cultivation as a source of food. If anything, off-farm incomes appear to have been used to enhance people's opportunities in terms of general lifestyle. However, incorporation brings with it new challenges, some of which directly influence cropping. But, instead of the marginalisation that is implied in commoditisation literature, incorporation sometimes results in reversed fortunes. Even then, this does not move in the direction predicted by modernisation theories. While markets may contribute to expanded choices, they can also make attaining food security a distant hope.

Growing up in Gusii: Aminga's story[2]

Aminga was born in 1914, the 'fourteenth year after the European arrival in Kisumu'. He is the eldest of his mother's nine children, three sons and six daughters. Aminga was raised much like any other Gusii boy. He recalls that as a child, his father looked after cattle. The father would wake up early in the morning (about 3 a.m.) to take the cattle grazing (*gochiragia*). At day break, he brought the animals home for milking, after which he again took them grazing and at this point Aminga joined him. As he was the eldest son, Aminga started herding livestock in the company of his father at the age of six. At meal times, his mother brought food to his father's house (*egesa tureti*). At the same time, his father received bowls of food from all his other wives. Aminga's father then shared this food with him and any other child who was around. Often there would be many other young children belonging to the homestead who would eat from this source. This characterised much of Aminga's eating habits until after his circumcision. Then he started having meals in his hut (*saiga*), together with other boys of his age. This food again came from his own mother, and the mothers of other boys who were with him.

These 'dining habits' benefited children who had no-one to cook for them and who would otherwise have gone hungry. People were conscious of this practice and in oral narratives, children who always ate in this way, away from home, were seen as poor.[3] And, although a hospitable person (*omosiani*) was repeatedly praised and their homes frequented, there are indications that this hospitality and generosity was not unlimited. For example, children could not feed from other homes on a continuous basis. Indeed, there are local sayings that point towards the futility of feeding people that are not part of one's household, especially when they may be expending their labour elsewhere.[4] On the other hand, nobody took pride in being referred to as tight-fisted (*ekero kia mobamba* or *omogoko*). Therefore the art was to know how to balance these contrasting expectations.

In 1926, at the age of 12, and even before he underwent circumcision, Aminga left for the Kericho Tea Estates, some 120 kilometres away. Once in Kericho, he got himself a three month contract. The work involved collecting and burning rubbish. He earned seven shillings a month. In 1929 he went back to the same job and this time he earned nine shillings a month. In 1933 he again returned to the Tea Estates, this time using some one else's identity card, and he worked for six months at a rate of forty shillings a month.[5] In 1950 he worked as a contractor supplying labourers to the Tea Estates and worked at this until 1959. He earned three shillings per labourer supplied to Kericho and twenty shillings each for those going to Mombasa. In 1961 Aminga got a fulltime job as a watchman at a coffee factory near his home, where he worked for 23 years. His salary rose from forty shillings a month, in 1961 to three hundred shillings when he retired, in 1984.[6]

In between his contracts at the Kericho Tea Estates, Aminga returned home to fulfil several obligations. During his first visit, he underwent his circumcision rites. The next time he returned home, Aminga settled into farming, and in 1933 he planted maize for the first time. After the harvest, he took this maize, on foot, to Mabira (Oyugis market, some 15 kilometres away) where he sold it at fifty cents a *debe*.[7] He used the money to buy soap and salt.

Unlike most young men, Aminga did not go to *gesarate* (the Gusii cattle villages) prior to his marriage and after circumcision. He explained that being the eldest, his father felt that he should not go and live at the frontier. When his father needed to have his cattle taken to *gesarate*, he gave them to other boys to herd for him.[8]

In 1940, Aminga married at the age of 26. Although he described this as the age of maturity for him because he was then a strong person and 'a wife could not overpower him', this must have also resulted from the fact that he was often away from home. Ordinarily, most young men delayed their marriage only if they could not raise bridewealth. In the case of Aminga, however, his father raised the necessary bridewealth for him as the eldest son. In 1943, Aminga's first child was born, another followed in 1945.[9] In 1954, Aminga was baptised into the Catholic Church where he also consecrated his marriage and, as he proudly put it, he has to date kept to this one woman.

Aminga explained that after his marriage, it was his mother who showed his wife where to cultivate, and this became her portion of land. After the death of his mother, Aminga's father gave him all the land that had belonged to her, including the piece cultivated by his wife. But Aminga also got additional pieces of land because, as the eldest son, he was entitled to inherit both from his mother's portion of land (in a polygamous setting) and also directly from his father. This suggests that there was a differentiation between land cultivation rights and inheritance. Aminga's wife gained access to land for cultivation through his mother but they could only inherit this land from Aminga's father. Although most of the land that Aminga now owns was passed down to him by his father, he explained that what his father owned had been acquired through taking occupation as opposed to it having been inherited directly from Aminga's grandfather (father's father).

In total, Aminga inherited 9.5 acres of land from his father. This 9.5 acres of land is located in three different places. The first six acres had 'belonged' to Aminga's mother and while she lived, Aminga's wife shared part of the land with her mother-in-law. In addition, Aminga received two acres of land located elsewhere. This land had come into his father's possession through clearing bush and taking occupation (*endemero*). The last piece of land that Aminga inherited is some 1.5 acres that his father had received from a maternal uncle (mother's brother), after this uncle had decided to migrate to the current Nyamira District.

According to Aminga, the contracts at the Tea Estates enabled him to invest in coffee, and when he entered into fulltime employment, these two sources brought him what he described as a 'good' income. He was able to send all his children, both boys and girls, to school. He lamented, however, that his children had never managed to get into salaried employment. Aminga also explained that due to his early access to cash, he could have afforded, as early as the 1940s, to build a corrugated iron roofed (*mabati*) house, but because his wife feared the repercussions of being conspicuous, he had to delay this decision until 1959. Aminga said that to date, coffee 'feeds him' and most of his cows were purchased with cash earnings from coffee. He has also allocated his wife some of the coffee trees that he planted on a portion of land that he owns away from home. She earns her money directly and uses it 'independently' while he too earns from the coffee trees nearby his home. Aminga's immediate plans were to develop a piece of land that he had purchased at a nearby market centre.[10]

Gaining access to land

Among the Gusii, land was used both for the cultivation of crops and for grazing livestock. Livestock grazing took place on communal grazing lands. Arable land was divided into three. One type was the land on which the family homestead stood and where subsistence farming was carried out by a wife and her children. The second type of land consisted of land where the head of the family cultivated crops for his private

use (*emonga*). This crop's harvest often served as security in case of a food shortage. The last type (*endemero*) was made up of land that was brought under cultivation by cutting down bush. This land was cultivated by several members of the clan on an individual and equal share basis. These 'dispersed' pieces of land were to disappear with the land consolidation policy (Chapter 3). Some of them, however, survived this policy and only ceased to exist when they were allocated to only some of the adult sons. This resulted in some close kin having to live far apart. For the sons who had to relocate, this geographical distance sometimes resulted in the need for new networks and alliances, and especially for purposes of meeting their food needs.

A typical Gusii farm consists of a long (and wide) strip of land running from the top of a ridge to a valley bottom and it includes the homestead. Customary land tenure is based on the principle that every male has heritable rights over arable lands, while grazing sites and forests are shared with kinsmen. Aminga narrated that when a man was grown, his father showed him where to construct a house and this became his land as long as he continued to cultivate it. If such an area was unoccupied, this person could also expand the frontier. When people wanted to expand their acreage, they organised themselves into a group to clear the thick bushes and till the land. It was then shared out equally among the group. This type of land was referred to as *endemero*.[11]

Aminga recollected that the place where he is currently living was all forest (*rinani*). This was because the dense bushland was difficult to clear, there were fewer people, and as he put it, in those days, all that they planted was finger millet and there was no greed for land.[12] Kinship remained the chief source of legitimate access to land and although there were individuals that were relatively more wealthy than others, this was not in terms of the amount of land owned. Wealth, esteem and influence stemmed from having a large herd of cattle, several wives and many offspring (Uchendu & Anthony 1975, p.26).

How and when then did land sizes begin to vary? Aminga explained that from olden days, people never had a uniform amount of land, in spite of the potential for 'unlimited access'. Once a person occupied a piece of land, he took up as much as he thought necessary and asked his relations to come and live alongside him so that together they could defend themselves from wild animals. Those who had a larger labour force were able to put more land under cultivation, and, over time, they accrued larger holdings. But people with many daughters were often deserted by their neighbours. After these girls married and therefore brought in cattle (as bridewealth), the neighbours, fearing for their crop, since there were no fences, soon migrated elsewhere leaving behind cleared land. This turned into communal land, or if those left behind were able to cultivate it all, they made new boundaries by placing stones along the edges. The colonial administration was later to use these 'demarcations' to draw boundaries.

Communal land sites increased after European occupation, as people moved elsewhere, especially following raids by the colonial forces, notably in 1905, 1908 and 1914 (Gethin 1953; Maxon 1971; 1981). Communal land, however, began to disappear around 1928 and, by 1935, when *ebisarate* (cattle villages) were finally eliminated by the

colonial administration, this communal grazing land became easily appropriated by the administration. Those who worked closely with the colonial administration got some of this land and in later periods, some of those in the civil service cheated their way into getting most of what remained. What was salvaged became Trust Land.[13]

According to Aminga, land started acquiring a new meaning as early as 1939. This is about the same period that maize cultivation for sale was at its peak and several other crops were already being grown for the market. In 1960, the Gusii started selling and buying land. Ownership changed hands in the presence of clan elders and as there were no title deeds, these transactions were affirmed by taking occupation. An acre then cost about six hundred shillings or 4 to 5 cows. These sales were mainly motivated by a desire for ready cash. The need for cash income has continued to dominate the reasons why people sell their land. While some of those who sold land during Aminga's youth needed to raise bridewealth, these needs have now expanded to include paying for children's education, health care or even purchasing food. The latter suggests some level of desperation since selling a 'renewable resource' to invest in a 'consumable one' rules out more dependable possibilities for the future.

Labour organization

In customary Gusii, division of labour was based on age and sex and the family was the main source of this labour. Male adults were the heads of the families. They generally managed the homes and performed non-routine tasks such as clearing the bush for cultivation, fencing around the homes, building houses, granaries and cattle sheds (*boma*), and defending the community against external aggression. On the other hand, women undertook almost all the routine agricultural and domestic work. This included seed selection, hoeing, sowing, weeding and harvesting. They also performed all household activities such as collecting firewood, fetching water, cooking, taking care of children, maintaining the houses, grinding finger-millet and giving advise to young girls on various issues pertaining to growing up. Similarly, young girls helped their mothers with duties around the home and in the fields. Uninitiated young girls looked after their younger siblings and they also helped their mothers in and around the house. The older men had most prestige, they discussed cattle and settled local and domestic disputes. They also supervised activities in cattle villages (*ebisarate*) and advised the young men in these villages on defence and general warfare. While still living in cattle villages, the young men herded cattle and supplied milk to their families whenever some of the cows calved while in *gesarate*. They also took part in hunting and trapping wild animals. Uninitiated boys looked after sheep and goats around the homestead and they also ran errands for older boys and the men (Uchendu & Anthony 1975; Kenya, District Socio-cultural Profiles 1986, p.37-38).

Although having many daughters enabled households to easily have more than sufficient food, this possibility was conditional. This was expressed in the saying that

mwanyabaiseke kerandi getakwoma botakana botagosira. This means that a home with many daughters never lacked milk as they were bound to bring in bridewealth (paid in the form of cattle). But, this home had no one to clear (and defend) the fields as this was the work of young men. Expansion farther afield, a source of increased wealth, depended on a household's ability to clear new ground. But paradoxically, the need for more land and its subsequent retention depended on the ability to cultivate the land in one's possession, a job that was largely performed by women and young girls.

Labour groups were common among the Gusii. These were mainly utilised during peak periods such as land preparation and harvesting. These groups were differentiated into *egesangio, risaga* and *ekeombe,* as outlined below (Kenya, District Socio-cultural Profiles 1986, p.39; Field Interviews, 1995-97).

Egesangio was a group made up of people from the same neighbourhood who voluntarily cooperated and worked on each other's fields on a reciprocal basis without being given any other remuneration. These groups were made up of women, and oral narratives further suggest that membership in *egesangio* consisted of contemporaries (*mogisangio*). Whenever these boundaries were exceeded to incorporate others, this was referred to as *ekebosano.*

The second type of work group was *risaga.* This was a cooperative group that performed both routine and non-routine work for a member of the community in exchange for local brew. The composition of this type of group was *ad hoc.* To attract labour, the home with a specific task to be performed, such as massive weeding or ploughing, prepared beer and old men in the neighbourhood were asked to send their (household) labour force to work. They often sent wives, daughters and daughters-in-law and young sons. After the day's work, the workers would return home and the old people (men) who had contributed to the workforce, took their beer straws (*chinkore*) and headed for the homestead to which they had given assistance. Here, they drank beer and sang songs in praise of themselves and their lineage. Young men and unmarried adult men, women and children were not allowed to partake. The drinking continued daily until the piece of work at hand was completed. Unlike *egesangio, risaga* was initiated and organised by men. The beer that was drank was brewed by women and the grain ordinarily came from the man's store (*emonga*). Although open to all, *risaga* had boundaries. There were clans that were left out or were unable to respond to the 'call' for labour due to some existing enmity/dispute, or because they were in-laws to those seeking labour and therefore needed to keep their distance and respect. *Ad hoc* work of this kind continued in Gusiiland until recently. However, the mode of operation has not been static. Among the changes is the shift in decision-making from the old men who 'commanded' all labour within their homestead, to heads of households as the persons to authorize and release labour to a needy neighbour. Besides this, the available labour started demanding privileges. They began to make their own individual decision as to whether to participate or not, and for those who agreed to participate, the beer ceremony and any other accompaniments were now due to them directly, irrespective of their age and gender. This even got to a point where whenever

someone wanted such labour, there were those who would go ahead and take up the 'contract' in exchange for all the beer or foodstuff that was on offer.

The third type of work group was *ekeombe*. In this group, both men and women worked on each others land but not necessarily in a reciprocal manner. The group was organized in such a way that any work done was paid for. This remuneration was kept in a common pool, until, after a certain length of time (usually one calendar year) when it was then shared out equally. The group could also be hired out to work for non-members. The *ekeombe* type of work group is a product of recent transformations. Remuneration was in cash and their labour was also offered to non-members for pay. In later years, these groups formed the basis for the cooperative movement and other grassroots organisations in Kisii.

In both organized and *ad hoc* labour groups, input was measured by the number of hours put in and these were equal and compulsory for each person. Whenever a member was indisposed, they were required to send a replacement. Hence, as soon as one decided to participate, one bound oneself to group rules and regulations pertaining to performing these tasks.

Food production calendar

Agriculture among the Gusii was a way of life. The Gusii calendar began and ended with the starting and completion of farm activities respectively. Seasons were named according to the agricultural cycle and celebrations and feasts centred around food harvests. Land and labour were central to farm activities and food production was the main occupation. Finger millet was the staple crop, and this was planted throughout the fields. Close to the home, farmers planted vegetables, and in the homestead compound, they grew maize and other supplementary crops. Each of the twelve months of the year signified the status of the food production cycle.

In January (*monungu n'barema)* fields were cleared and land preparation began. These activities went into the months of February (*eng'atiato*) and the dry spell of March (*egetamo*) when twigs were removed or trimmed. In April (*rigwata*) finger millet was sown using the broadcast method. One farmer noted that the current pattern of planting in March or earlier is an adoption of the highland agricultural calendar (see Chapters 1 & 6). This suggests that, contrary to arguments in the literature that depict the peasant farmer as one that never adopted and adapted, farm activities among the Gusii have never been static. As is evident from discussions in Chapter 6, much of the movement towards a different cropping calendar has been necessitated by changing circumstances, mainly access to land and labour. But, there is also information to show that these changes are a result of some intervention (see Chapter 1).

The month of June (*ebwagi*) was, and continues to be as the Gusii name implies, a period of scarcity. Households that had not stored well or had harvested less than their minimum requirements were faced with shortages. Such households are depicted in

oral narratives as belonging to the lazy and poor members of society. Poverty was perceived in human resource terms and production was almost always a function of labour input. The month of July (*engoromoni*) was characterised by *ogosuma*, seeking food aid from family/relatives. Vine & Vine writing about their field work among the Gusii of Nyansiongo now in Nyamira District observe that

> just before harvest, granaries begin to run low and food anxiety is common ... The midday meal is eliminated in most households, and all adults limit their diets drastically. Social visiting is at a minimum since usual hospitality norms cannot be met. People know they cannot expect their neighbours to feed them or give them drink. Women visit their own kin to 'beg' for food and they are usually given bananas. These are often in full supply throughout this period, but bananas are only considered suitable for snacks ... some women also plant small fields of sweet potatoes, beans and peas to provide supplementary food supply, for these can mature during the short rains (Vine & Vine 1966, p.13).

In August (*riete*) the men started making new granaries and old ones were renovated and cleaned up in preparation for a new harvest. Harvesting began in August and continued into the month of September (*eburiati ya kebaki*) when sorghum was trimmed in readiness for the second flowering. October (*egesunte gia chache*) through December (*esagati*) was a period of rest, a time for festivity that culminated in thanks giving to *engoro*, portrayed in oral narratives as the supernatural (cf Chapter 6). *Ribina*[14] dancing marked the end of year and the setting off of the process all over again.

Food storage

Food production among the Gusii was, until the 1930s, synonymous with the cultivation of finger millet (*wimbi*). The failure of this crop meant hunger, and excesses meant prosperity and colourful entertainment during rituals and festivals. In retrospect, Gusii farmers have continued to argue that although demanding in terms of labour, finger millet stored well, it was widely used in beer brewing and it commanded a premium value in exchange for other commodities from the neighbouring Luo community and even amongst the Gusii themselves (Uchendu & Anthony 1975, p.28-29).

Upon harvest, finger millet was stored in granaries. After threshing (*ok'ora*), the grain was stored in *emenyoncho* (conical containers), *chiny'ongo* (clay pots) and *ebitera* (earth holes). Variations in quantities of food harvested resulted from the size of the workforce. Households that had a large number of adult children to clear fields, plough and weed were always ahead of the rest. Much of this performance depended on the organising capabilities of women (wives). For this reason, in marriage, most men looked out for a hard working girl and polygamy continued to be very practical.

Having many daughters had an additional advantage. Upon harvest, daughters and young boys stored their *wimbi* with their mothers while older boys and adult men (husbands) stored separately (*emonga*). Once the older boys and adult men accumulated enough grain, they exchanged this for goats and this marked the beginning of their accumulation (*okoniba*). The food stocks belonging to the head of the household were not accessible to his wife (wives) except in cases of severe shortage. Men with a lot of finger millet in their granaries could give it out as bridewealth for a wife from a family with food shortages. And, whenever there was a bumper harvest, the food was stored until the next harvest when this surplus was exchanged for livestock, primarily goats. Therefore, even after a bumper harvest, people continued to cultivate finger millet year after year. They always worked towards adding more, in case of bad months ahead and households only felt secure when they had food that could last them in excess of the year ahead (Field Interviews, August 1996).

While women were directly in-charge of food storage, procurement was a communal responsibility. Each member of the household participated in this process, either in clearing fields, planting, harvesting or bringing additional land under cultivation. But, how long a harvest lasted depended on the organising skill of a wife. Women were supposed to undertake good storage (*gokunga*) while men were expected to acquire wealth (*gosacha*). The argument that food production has been left in the hands of women is therefore not culturally rooted. In Gusii traditions, men went out in search of food as hunters and this food was brought home and left in the custody of the wife (wives). Similarly, men cleared fields, expanded the frontiers and defended the community's land against external aggression, therefore creating the opportunity for women to grow food. In essence, therefore, men provided the resources and women utilised them for purposes of feeding the family. But, there is an underlying indication that while women procured and received for purposes of distribution to the family, men accumulated.

Incorporation into the market economy

In 1907, the first white men, Northcote and Hemsted, arrived in Gusiiland. They identified a site for their base and supervised the construction of an administrative site, the Kisii Station, which was later to become Kisii Town. This decision was favoured by the highland climate and the fertile soils of the region. The residence of these colonial administrators in Gusiiland set in motion the incorporation of the region, both administratively and economically. They soon selected their own chiefs and headmen, began collecting taxes and demanded that the people bring all criminal and civil cases before the administration.

The Gusii were the last to be brought under British rule, compared with their neighbours such as the Luo and the Kipsigis. Maxon explains this delay as resulting from the fact that before 1902 when the then Eastern Province was transferred to the

East African Protectorate, Gusiiland was too far in the interior for British interests, which mainly centred on keeping the supply lines to Uganda open. The arrival of the British in Gusiiland was triggered by a clan dispute and raids on the Luo who were already under British rule. Oral narratives state that in 1905, Ombati from the Bogusero clan approached the British in Kisumu seeking protection against Bogetutu, a rival clan. At the same time, a patrol of troops was sent to Gusiiland to protect the Luo from raids by the Gusii. This patrol entered Gusiiland in September 1905 and forcibly collected cattle as fines. While departing, the patrol was attacked. This offensive was made worse by the presence of Ombati, Bogetutu's enemy, who was now playing the role of interpreter to the British (Maxon 1969, p.350; Field Interviews, 1995-97).

Gusii resistance heightened when the British administration started demanding taxes. In addition to the poll tax that was paid by every adult male, the people were also expected to pay another three rupees as hut tax, for every house owned.[15] Gusii men were therefore forced to sell their cattle to raise the money to pay these taxes. As a result, many Swahili traders were drawn to the District in search of livestock for re-sale (Maxon 1969, p.353). This culminated in the 1908 uprising in Gusiiland. This revolt was precipitated by the spearing of Northcote by Otenyo, in an attempt to stop the administration from driving away Gusii cattle. Although the Bogetutu people put up a spirited attack, Northcote had a better armed force (Field Interviews, 1995-97; Maxon 1969, p.353).

Maxon writes that the Gusii remained hostile to the British administration and to make inroads in Gusiiland, force continued to be applied. This force was mainly directed towards the need for the large amounts of food that were required to feed the numerous porters and police engaged in the construction and surveillance of the Kisii Station. The food needs of the British administration and their work force depended so much on supplies from the Gusii that when one headman

> 'failed to bring in food, he was locked [up] in the guard tent until food and firewood were brought. A month later when grain was once again [in] short [supply] in the station, Northcote went into Bogetutu and took grain, goats and sheep by force' (Maxon 1969, p.352).

However, in spite of its potential, the physical infrastructure in Kisii remained poor and other support services were equally lacking.[16] Maxon has argued that the need for expert advise and 'guidance' in agriculture and veterinary matters continued to stifle agricultural expansion. An agricultural inspector was not posted to the region until 1924 and he left the following year (Maxon 1971, p.119). Even for the one year that this agricultural worker resided in the area, he only engaged in directing cultivation and maintaining some small demonstration plots. Although the need for 'expert advise' might look like support for the modernisation approach to agriculture, this is not the point. This criticism is based on the position that while attempting to change what the

Gusii were already knowledgeable in, the colonial administration did not make it possible for the people to (continue to) excel in agriculture.

Nevertheless, because the depression of the 1920s in Europe forced the settler farmers out of business, the colonial administration was compelled to look up to the then 'African Reserves' for food and revenue. A staff of 'fully trained' personnel was posted to the area, and seed farms were set up in which high yielding and better quality varieties were tested and distributed. Agricultural 'instructions' were now mainly carried out by Africans. Maxon has therefore argued that the early 1930's marked a turning point for the economy of Gusiiland. Partly as a result of the depression, the colonial administration embarked upon a much more 'positive' program of economic development. This manifested itself in the search for increased production and the introduction of coffee on African farms (Maxon 1971, p.187). Tea and pyrethrum were introduced in 1954 and 1960, respectively.

While the Gusii region may have been a grainbasket and this made the people prosperous, this success story flows from a much more complex scenario. For example, the outbreak of the second World War saw the return of many Gusii youth from the Kericho Tea Estates for fear of being forcibly conscripted, a Maize Control Board was established to enforce and regulate marketing, and the compulsory sale of cattle and labour for civil purposes was instituted, processes that further interfered with agricultural production, and food needs in particular. The return of the Gusii youth from the Kericho Tea Estates created a displaced group as they found themselves without an established occupation.[17] Although their presence contributed to increased production, this return marked the beginning of a form of underemployment, particularly when marketing fell under severe restrictions. For example, in April 1931, all export and sale of foodstuffs was prohibited except by permit, and as a result, prices remained low for most of that year (Field Interviews, 1995-97; Maxon 1971, p.171; Kenya, South Kavirondo Report 1931a). And as we will see later on, in spite of these low prices, restrictions in the movement of maize exacerbated the adverse effects that followed the 1931 locust invasion, notably in south Mugirango, Bonchari and Bogusero areas of Gusiiland.

Sources of food in Kisii during the incorporation process can therefore be broken down into three phases. One, the subsistence set-up where, in the absence of 'natural' challenges, food output depended on labour and land, both of which were readily available. Two, entry into the commodity market and the introduction of maize as an export crop stimulated production and at the same time, this altered the food patterns of the Gusii. Although maize cropping was favoured by the colonial administration, the food needs of the Gusii were nevertheless not severely threatened during this second phase. By the end of the war period, the Gusii were still food secure and crop diversification and trade had come to cushion them against the natural disasters that had characterised their food security in phase one. But, the introduction of cash crops, mainly coffee (and tea), marked a major turning point in their food security. During this third phase, food production 'returned' to subsistence status but, this time, the Gusii

also struggled to engage in cash cropping. The District's food situation is now largely dependent on these choices, the most significant being the movement towards commodity production. In many ways therefore, the struggle has been to produce both for subsistence and with the increased need for cash, for the market.

Establishment of maize farming

Prior to the colonial period, maize was a secondary grain among the Gusii, grown only as a backyard crop (*egeticha*), mainly for roasting. This maize type was of a black and white mix locally known as *emekebaru*. Seed for this maize was generated as follows: after harvest, some of the maize was 'roasted' (for purposes of drying) and then hung in the kitchen (*isang'ina*) where they continued to be covered with soot (*omw'are*), and this provided the necessary protection until the next planting.

Discussing the change over from the traditional mixed colour maize to the pure white seed, one respondent gave an account of his first encounter with the new maize seed. According to his recollections, the new maize seed that was introduced in his home area originally came from Uganda and was brought to the area by some Maragoli (Luhya) speaking people who had migrated to the place. The local people referred to this new seed as *rigegu*, a direct translation for molar teeth (*amagegu*). This is because the seed was white in colour and big in size. In 1950 some members of his work group decided to plant *rigegu* seed while others stuck to *emekebaru* seed. However, the white maize came out blackened due to cross-pollination. Soon, the entire group decided to shift to planting *rigegu* seed and this marked the end of *emekebaru* maize seed in the area. Thereafter, the people regenerated seed using the trunk side of the maize cob. *Emekebaru* maize seed was replaced by *rigegu* and the latter was replaced by hybrid seed. But *emekebaru* has persisted because, *omonto bwanchete nyama ya gokwa tagotiga*, that is, old habits die hard (Field Interviews, 1996).[18]

Another respondent, however, recounted that the new maize seed, which he also referred to as *rigegu* for similar reasons to those already discussed, was introduced in his home area in 1918 by the British (*Abasongo*). At that point, a few people took up the new seed but they only grew it along the crop borders (*chimbebe*) and maize continued to serve as a snack food. This was largely because in the absence of maize milling techniques, the people could not generate maize flour for use in their staple diet, *ugali*.[19] This forced them to consume the maize whole by boiling them, an unusual diet for the Gusii. The change over from finger millet to maize flour was stimulated by the introduction of the first water powered flour mill (*eregaregu*) in the area, in 1919.[20] This flour mill was owned by an Indian known as Chania, who however mainly milled maize for the colonial government.[21] In 1936, a second mill was set up by Senior Chief Ooga, and the consumption of *ugali* made from maize flour expanded, to the detriment of finger millet.

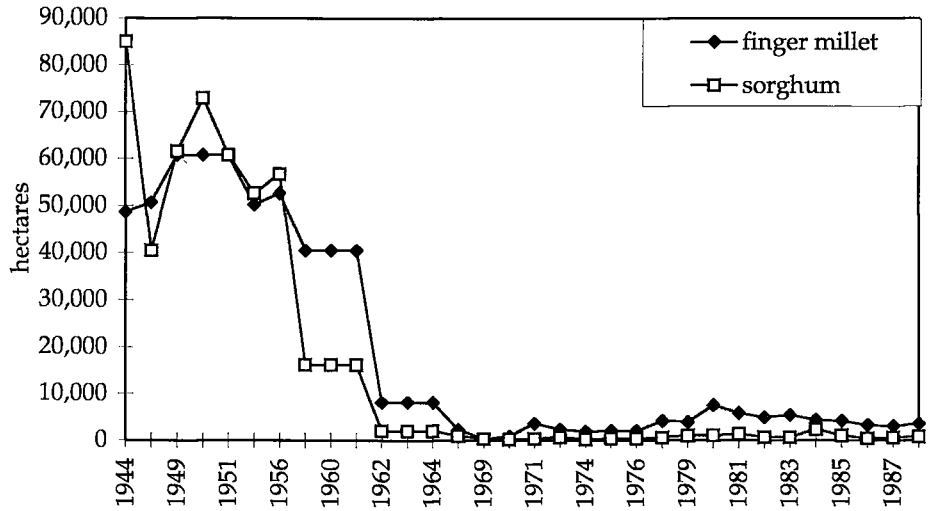


Figure 4.1 Area under finger millet and sorghum, Kisii District, 1944-1988
Source: Compiled from Annual Reports, Department of Agriculture, Kisii District

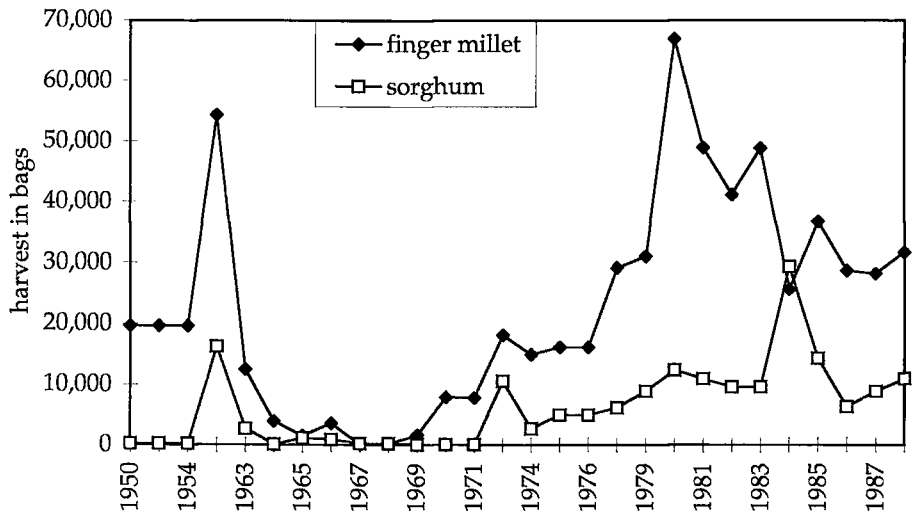


Figure 4.2 Finger millet and sorghum harvests in Kisii District, 1950-1988
Source: Compiled from Annual Reports, Department of Agriculture, Kisii District

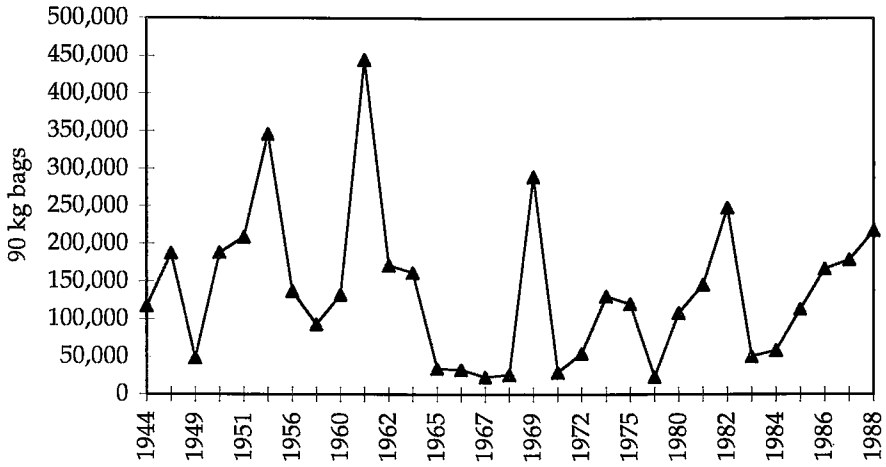


Figure 4.3 Amount of maize marketed in Kisii District, 1944-1988 [22]
Source: Compiled from Annual Reports, Department of Agriculture, Kisii District

Although maize never overtook finger millet in acreage until around 1954, there was a deliberate move to promote maize cultivation, and even better, attract its availability on the market. Some of the methods used included price incentives, transportation subsidies, inducing a desire for factory made farm inputs and other household necessities, and coercive ones such as the need to pay poll and hut taxes.[23] Increasingly, the importance of finger millet receded and while the crop is still perceived as the coveted staple food of the Gusii, most farmers are now of the opinion that finger millet no longer does as well and it is also too demanding in terms of labour input. There is therefore a general fear that finger millet will soon be extinct because the knowledge and skill pertaining to its production is not being passed on from one generation to another, as used to be the case. Finger millet has even suffered more because it is considered a woman's crop.[24] But, before maize mills were introduced and for as long as maize fetched money on the market as an export crop, finger millet continued to enjoy the status of a staple crop, to be produced at all costs. Both finger millet and sorghum have benefitted from improved yields. Hence, in spite of the drastic reduction in area planted, output for these two crops has remained relatively high (Figures 4.1 & 4.2).

A considerable proportion of the maize that was harvested prior to the 1950s was marketed, largely because, as pointed out above, it was necessary. Nevertheless, during this period as in subsequent years, the amount of maize released on the market fluctuated and as of 1988, this was down by almost one half (Figure 4.3). The general downward trend resulted from a shift in policy towards newly introduced crops such as coffee and tea and hence a relative drop in the price of maize. This was accelerated by a rising demand for maize at the household level after it replaced finger millet as the

staple food, and due to the availability of a parallel market that was also found to be more conducive than selling to the NCPB. Hence, whereas almost all the maize that was grown prior to the 1950s was sold, this reduced to about 32 percent in 1962. Although the proportion of maize marketed picked up again in 1969, the actual quantities sold were, as is clear from Figure 4.3 above, lowest soon after independence. In 1980, only 4 percent of the maize harvest was marketed through these official channels (cf Figure 1.2). Although this rose to 10 percent in 1988, the amount of maize marketed through government parastatals has reduced drastically following the liberalisation of the maize market.

Introduction to cash crop farming

Kisii, Embu and Meru were the only Districts in Kenya where Africans were permitted by the colonial government to grow cash crops that were otherwise the preserve of European settlers (Maxon 1981, p.120). The selection of these three Districts is said to have been based on the observation that these areas were isolated and therefore badly needed high value cash crops (Heyer 1974). The most practical reason, however, seems to be that the soil potential in the three Districts was good and since each one of them was far from European farms, they did not pose any threat to settler farming.[25] The Gusii's enthusiasm to grow coffee is reflected in a report from the District Agricultural Officer (DAO) to the colonial administration pointing out that it was 'no longer a question of persuading people to plant, but one of selecting the most suitable applicants and allowing them to plant small areas only' (Kenya, District Annual Reports 1945). A total of 78 hectares were under coffee in 1933 and by 1946, farmers in Kisii had more than doubled the area under coffee.

The introduction of coffee farming marked the beginning of a permanent policy switch from growing food crops for the market to producing raw material for industry. In Kisii, this became more pronounced when the second World War ended bringing to a halt the need for food exports. With a new era in Europe, import needs shifted to the desire for raw materials. However, the entry of the Gusii into cash crop farming only sustained their access to farm incomes, a process that had began with the introduction of maize as a marketed crop. As a result of this policy switch, for many years thereafter, every Gusii farmer aspired to plant coffee and those who had some coffee trees prior to the 1980s were relatively prosperous. Most of the coffee growers at the time were 'progressive' farmers who were equally good in other farm activities. In addition, coffee farming was a gateway to other benefits such as membership in cooperative societies. This membership is limited to cash croppers and it carries such benefits as a credit line and favourable attitudes from extension workers. By independence in 1963, there were over 29,000 coffee growers in Kisii, having risen from a modest 196 growers in 1941. This enthusiasm continued to characterise land use patterns in the area, with every farmer aspiring to have some land under coffee (cf Chapter 5).

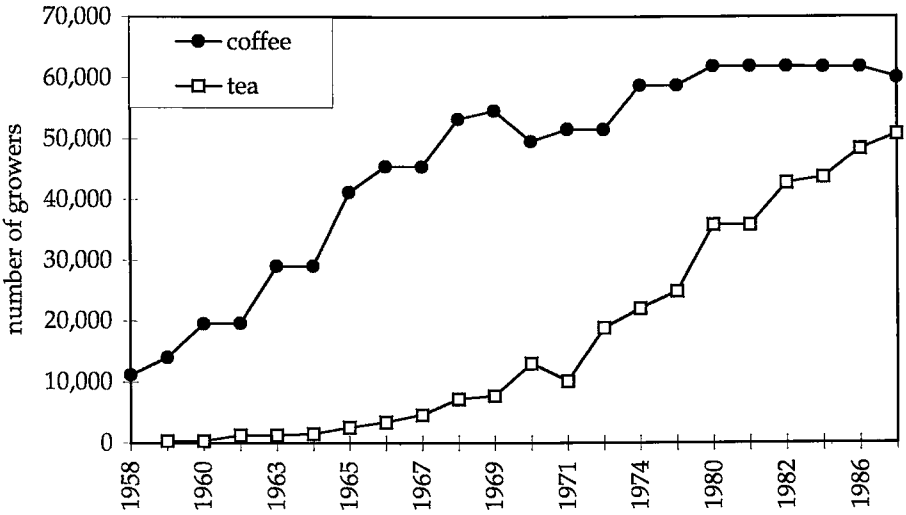


Figure 4.4 Number of coffee and tea growers in Kisii District, 1958-1987
Source: Compiled from Agricultural Annual Reports, Kisii District

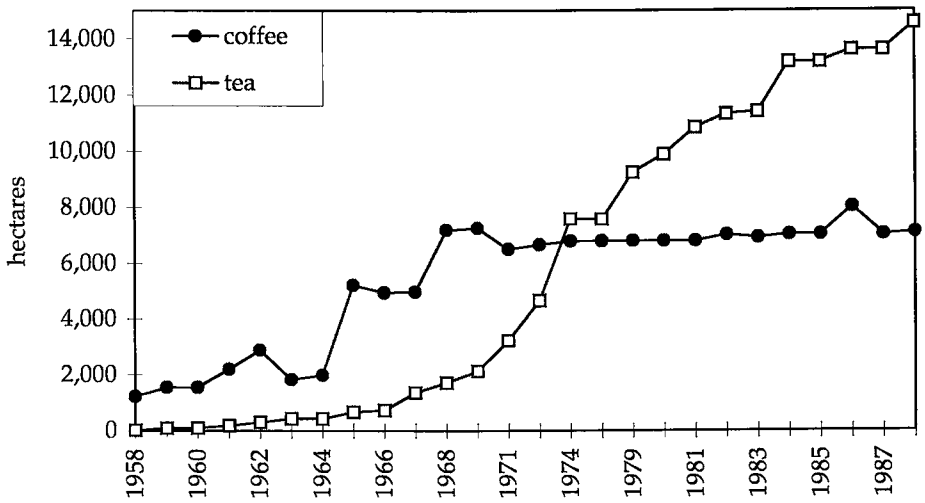


Figure 4.5 Area under coffee and tea in Kisii District, 1958-1988
Source: Compiled from Agricultural Annual Reports, Kisii District

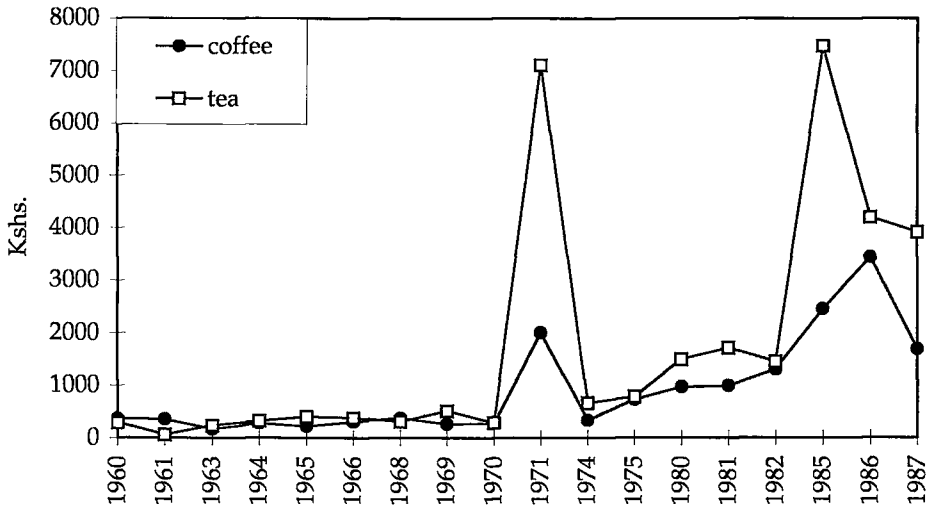


Figure 4.6 Average annual earnings to each coffee and tea farmer in Kisii District, 1960-1987
Source: Compiled from Agricultural Annual Reports, Kisii District

By the end of the first decade of independence, the number of coffee growers in Kisii had almost doubled and this has remained way ahead of tea (Figures 4.4). Similarly, area under coffee rose rapidly until the end of the 1970s (Figure 4.5).[26] In 1979, there was more land under tea (9,239 hectares) compared to coffee (6,787 hectares), but the number of coffee growers (61,892) has remained higher than that of tea (35,777). In terms of incomes however, the majority of farmers in the District are, unfortunately, now dependent on what has come to be a poorer paying cash crop (Figure 4.6). Although the average returns to coffee farmers per annum rose from Kshs. 276 in 1964 to Kshs. 336 in 1974 and Kshs. 2,452 in 1985, this dropped to Kshs. 1,690 in 1987. On the other hand, similar returns to tea farmers rose from Kshs. 326 in 1964 to Kshs. 668 in 1974 and a record Kshs. 7,466 in 1985. But, like coffee, this dropped to Kshs. 3,905 in 1987. In general, unlike in the 1960s, returns from coffee have become less competitive in comparison to tea.

The shift to conventional cash crops, majorly coffee and tea, was expected to enhance the District's food security. According to the agricultural policy of the colonial administration and that of current thinking, farmers should engage in the cultivation of (export) crops where they enjoy a relative advantage and thereafter use their incomes to meet their food needs on the market. It is, however, questionable how far this can be the case, given that world market prices for major commodities have progressively dropped. In Kisii, the fall in coffee prices has put those who invested in the crop in a predicament. The returns are low and given the multiplicity of household needs, these cash incomes cannot cover general subsistence. At the same time, cash cropping continues to compete for the same resources as food production. And, with rapidly

reducing land sizes, it is impossible to diversify cropping with the hope of widening the scope for both subsistence and cash incomes.

Penetration of markets

> 'I must go to the market and when I get there, I look for three persons: my friend, my debtor and my enemy. If I do not know whether any of them is at the market, I am ill at ease. And when I go to the market and do not see them at all, the market is not good' (E.P. Skinner 1968:270 in Birundu 1973, p.45).

Although markets were not new to the Gusii, their role in the people's food security has changed over the years. The market has been transformed from a place to obtain complementary supplies to a mandatory source of food. The most drastic of the changes is probably the amount of control that people have over markets. In the barter era, markets were just an optional source of food, they provided an alternative but this remained, to a large extent just an option. In the colonial period, markets were, for the major part, an extension of colonial rule. Lately, a view that is aptly captured by Skinner, markets have become a mixed blessing, a paradox in rural life.

Measures to enrol the Gusii in markets mainly centred on the introduction of new crops, the export of agricultural produce out of the District and the use of political power to enforce these 'linkages'. During this period, we see a struggle by the Gusii to accommodate and at the same time resist forces of commoditisation by ensuring that in times of food shortages, little was marketed. Alongside this, an inter-dependence between the agriculturally rich Gusii and their food-deficient Luo neighbours flourishes from simple barter to a cash economy.

Barter trade, exchanging assets

Gusii oral narratives suggest that the exchange of commodities has always existed. What is new are the unfolding choices regarding the actual items to be exchanged, the mode of trade, and the expansion in trading boundaries. The Gusii traded amongst themselves, with their neighbours, mainly the Luo and also with outsiders, such as Indian traders and European merchants. In the initial period, most of the trade with 'outsiders', including those from different Gusii clans, took place at border points. In cases where the Gusii needed to travel to these border points, only women went to meet their counterparts, sometimes under the escort of a few men (Field Interviews, 1995-97). Women were preferred because it was believed that they were less likely to be molested along the way. It was also feared by both sides that if men were to be engaged in the exchange, they would end up spying on the skill and techniques of others. Furthermore, there was a concern that the men might engage in 'stealing' girls from other clans and

therefore take shortcuts into marriage as opposed to working towards raising the required bridewealth.[27]

Barter trade was mainly conducted so as to acquire items that one did not have. From the list of things that the Gusii exchanged amongst themselves, it is evident that food grain was also traded (Table 4.1). Finger millet was mainly used to acquire farm implements such as hoes and axes. These iron made implements were very scarce, partly because they were made by specific people, on a lineage basis, *ororeri*. Those who received grain were not necessarily food insecure. They too exchanged this grain for a goat or anything else that could enable them to accumulate wealth. Nevertheless, the fact that food was a medium of exchange does suggest that there were those among the Gusii who actually depended on trade to meet their consumption needs. It is also apparent that agricultural produce was relatively better remunerated than was to be the case in the cash economy.

Table 4.1 Trade among the Gusii

a basket (*ekee*) of finger millet	a hoe (*egesire*)
a basket of finger millet	a sickle
one bull	a hoe
30 goats	one cow/bull
two hens	a small goat
one small basket of finger millet	one knife
one small cow	one marriage stool
one small basket of finger millet	one axe

Source: Compiled from Field Interviews, 1995-97; Birundu 1973, p.29

In addition to trading amongst themselves, the Gusii also traded with the Luo. These trade ties increased in volume to the extent that when regular markets became established, cattle raids also ceased between the two communities (Field Interviews, 1995-97). Much of this trade took place along their common border, although in later years Luo traders were to be seen with donkey loads of lick-salt and pots walking from place to place in the Gusii region, hawking. Before then, while the Gusii and the Luo traded at border areas, Gusii women who went to the Luo border points to trade travelled in a group escorted by one or two men. There were no fixed market days although moonlit seasons were preferred in case night fell in the course of the journey (Birundu 1973). With time, fixed meeting places developed near the borders and these were later to become market centres and established towns (Obudho & Waller 1976).

The Gusii mainly bartered finger millet (*wimbi*) for Luo pottery, fish and salt. In cases of severe need, the Luo also exchanged their cattle for grain (Table 4.2). It is again

apparent that in both cases, people gave away that which they were best skilled in while they acquired that which they needed most. Paradoxically, the Luo gave the Gusii items of weaponry in spite of the raids that they sometimes carried out on each other.

Table 4.2 Trade between the Gusii and the Luo[28]

Gusii	Luo
one calabash of *wimbi* (finger millet)	same amount of salt (*ebara*)
one pot of *wimbi*	same size pot (*enyongo*)
one hoe	one cow
one goat	a small portion of poison
one large basket of *wimbi*	one shield
one basket of *wimbi*	same size basket (*egetonga*)
one pot *wimbi*	same size pot of sour milk (*egechieto*)

Source: Compiled from Field Interviews, 1995-97; Birundu 1973, p.29

Both oral narratives and existing records do not suggest much trade between the Gusii and their other neighbours except in severe famine situations. There are, however, some minor indications that the Gusii traded with the Bantu speaking Kuria to the South and the Nilotic speaking Maasai and Kipsigis to the East. Oral narratives also suggest that Arab traders came to Gusii before Indians, Nubians, Somalis and the British themselves though, they stayed only briefly. They exchanged bangles and beads for food and ivory. These early visits are corroborated by observations that for a long time, Gusii women commonly wore beads and bangles as part of their cultural ornamentation.

The colonial era

Annual Reports for the period 1914-1945 show that colonial interest in marketing agricultural produce from the Gusii region increased when the first World War broke out. This was necessitated by the need to feed British troops,[29] a demand that expanded with the extension of the railway line to Kisumu, the opening of the Kakamega gold fields and the Tea Estates in Kericho and to a lesser degree, an increasing awareness that some parts of Kenya were experiencing food shortages. While these exports have been used in arriving at the conclusion that the Gusii benefitted immensely from the commercialisation of their agricultural production (Kenya, District Annual Reports 1945), this is not devoid of exaggeration. The period was also characterised by controls whose main aim was to make grain available on the market, but at a minimal cost, and no actual investment was made in the long term development of Gusiiland. In other

words, the period in question concentrated on the extraction of cheap agricultural produce for the export market and the urban labour force.

Maxon has argued that throughout the war period, trade in agricultural produce in Gusii was generally depressed. He explains that during this period, the colonial administration spent their time and energy producing men for work as carrier corps and there were no specially trained agricultural officers assigned to the District. He further argues that there was little market for Gusii grain except among the Luo, and although the conditions of the war period made it worse, the 'position of Gusiiland in relation to potential markets long remained an inhibiting factor to the export of surplus foodstuffs' (Maxon 1971, p.108-9). This position is supported by the observation that Gusiiland was relatively isolated from any large markets, produce had to be carried to the lake ports by ox cart and from there it was sent to the railway terminus in Kisumu by boat, a long and expensive route. This difficulty in transporting agricultural produce to outside markets due to poor infrastructure and relative isolation was long to hold back agricultural development even in post-independence Kisii.[30]

On the other hand, given the volume of exports that nevertheless left the Gusii region, the lagging behind of the District is best explained by the low remuneration, both for farm and off-farm employment.[31] But, unlike the current period, people then had other possibilities and they could therefore choose to keep markets at bay. For example, during the period 1919-1921, trade reduced following a slow recovery and poorer prices, an aftermath of the war. By March 1919, 75 percent of the Indian shops were forced to close down for lack of supplies. Exports from Gusiiland were limited to *sim-sim* (rapeseed) and hides. The first large amounts of maize out of the area only resumed in 1922 (Maxon 1971, p.118-119).

Indian traders

The Indian traders who settled in Gusiiland were both a blessing and a nuisance to the Gusii. These traders were encouraged to settle in Gusiiland by the colonial administration so as to induce the Gusii to invest in markets. Secondly, the Indians were used to keep the Gusii 'out of town'.[32] On the other hand, however, the Indians provided the Gusii with an outlet for their farm produce. The first Indian traders settled at Karungu, the then Headquarters for Nyanza (Kavirondo). They thereafter moved to Kisii and by 1914 there were 13 Indian traders with 4 shops. These shops stocked cloth, blankets, hoes, utensils, salt, sugar and tea. These goods were imported into the country by fellow Indian merchants in Kisumu and brought to Kisii by steamer via Kendu Bay (Rajwani 1971). Initially, these goods were bartered for local produce, mainly maize, millet, beans, wheat, *sim-sim* and ghee. Rupees were later introduced.

The Indian shopkeepers used Nubian, Somali, Luo and Gusii agents to take goods such as beads, copper, hoes and medicines into the interiors of Gusiiland for sale. The colonial administration encouraged this and they even allowed Indian traders to

accompany 'officers on *safari*' so as to induce the Gusii to invest more in imported goods. Besides raising revenue, this was also indirectly aimed at making the Gusii desire cash income which would then force them to sell and therefore reduce their livestock herds, in addition to seeking wage employment off-farm. The colonial administration also used the Indians in Kisii to distribute agricultural seed and farm implements so as to stimulate the production of products that would earn the administration revenue once exported to other districts in the country and to overseas markets.

Alongside the Indians were European traders. Writing about his own trade expeditions, Gethin describes how he moved finger millet and sorghum flour from Kisii to sell to the Maasai, a 70 kilometre journey that he and his assistants made by donkey. He explains that

> 'although it was a hard life, I enjoyed the *safaris* to the Maasai. I met a number of old friends I had brought down from Rumuruti in 1912, including Chief Masacondi. The Maasai were hungry and their women and children were only too pleased to have the flour, for which they paid from 30 to 40 rupees per 60 lb load. The shooting was good, and in those days big tuskers plentiful, while the price of ivory was approximately Shs. 17 per lb. Questions were not asked if you shot the elephant first and then took out your licence, although this procedure was strictly illegal (Gethin 1953, p.4).[33]

Seemingly, markets provided a source of cash income for the Gusii while enabling their neighbours meet their food needs. And, except in rare instances, the Gusii did not, during this period, depend on markets for their food needs. However, over time, the Gusii's food needs started going beyond what they could cultivate. While the introduction of good farming techniques may have enhanced production, diversification of cropping patterns jeopardised the possibilities that increased cultivation could offer. The movement towards commodity production introduced new demands, which then induced change in the search for food and for this, the District's food situation was severely ruptured.

Famine, hunger and food shortages

obori bw'baba keanda
e'keanda obori bw'baba, obori bw'baba keanda
e'keanda baba omotegera nyangweso
e'nyangweso yacha yabori
e'yaboria, enywagweso yacha
enyangweso yacha yabori
e'yaboria, baba omotegera nyangweso
(a Gusii song lamenting a locust invasion).[34]

Famine, hunger and food shortages are types of food insecurity whose conceptualisation overlaps. Food shortages may lead to hunger which in turn may result in a famine. But, in a practical sense, it is difficult to differentiate and therefore draw a line between some of these processes. In general, however, famine is a severe food shortage that is assumed to give way to hunger and starvation. It is a societal crisis induced by the dissolution of the accustomed availability of, and access to staple foods on a scale sufficient to cause starvation among a significant number of individuals.[35] Hence, famine is a widespread form of food shortage and it results in social and economic disorganisation and even death. In spite of this, not all famines lead to starvation.[36]

In Gusii oral history, hunger was synonymous with food shortages and these were perceived to arise from a shortfall in one's harvest. But, there were established mechanisms to enable those faced with hunger or inadequate food (*enchara*) to meet their needs in the interim period. On the other hand, famine, locally referred to as *egeku* (deadly disaster) was seen as an unavoidable occurrence, which then suggests that there were no laid down mechanisms to salvage such a situation. Almost all reported famines were attributed to some natural (supernatural) catastrophe that went beyond the people's control. Although most of the famines are said to have lasted for no more than one year, they had devastating consequences on the lives of the people, directly challenging existing safety nets. These famines were eventful, but they are also reported to have come to pass with the harvest of a new crop. But, while there may be fewer famines today, many people are no less threatened by ordinary food shortages than they may have been by an eventful famine.

Gusii oral narratives do not, however, indicate whether there were famines and food shortages prior to colonisation. While it could be easily concluded that hunger set in with the movement towards a market economy, the existence of *ogosuma* (a food aid practice) and the barter trade in grain suggest that (some) households did face shortfalls, which one might assume they generally countered through these same mechanisms. Nevertheless, some of the food shortages went beyond the capacity of such mechanisms to resolve them. This section therefore looks at the reasons that were offered to explain some of these food shortages, who suffered in the process, how and why, and who intervened, if at all.

An act of God

Food shortages in Kisii were, prior to the 1930s, attributed to natural disasters, an act of God.[37] The earliest reported famine among the Gusii known as *langi* took place in 1896.[38] This famine, whose name seems to have been borrowed from their Luo neighbours, resulted from excessive ravages by locusts. The locusts initially attacked the lake shores of neighbouring Luo Nyanza before spreading to the Kisii Highlands. There were numerous deaths from starvation and a smallpox epidemic had disastrous effects

on a population that was already weakened by hunger. Many migrated during this period. The *langi* famine ended with the harvest of 1897.

Although famines are perceived as blanket disasters, this was not the case in Gusiiland. During the *langi* famine (which in Luo means to 'lick with the tongue'),[39] some people fed on tree barks while others fed on animals skins and by implication some must have fed on animal meat. Moreover, the fact that children were exchanged for food suggests that there were those among the Gusii who had more food than others. Since the size of one's labour force was a valued asset, those with food made a profit. And, as early as this period, we see a breakdown in the social safety nets. Instead of giving food aid, acute scarcity resulted in giving up children in exchange for food.[40]

In 1914, the Gusii were afflicted by yet another famine, locally referred to as *nyabiage* or *nyamauga*. During this famine, which is reported to have been caused by drought, granaries were swept clean, a rare occurrence and indeed a taboo at the time. People were forced to feed on dead animals and even worse, the bones of these dead animals were ground into flour for consumption, hence the name *nyamauga*. This was closely followed by yet another famine in 1918, known as *kunga*, also 'caused' by a delay in rainfall. Some oral narratives refer to this famine as *enchara ya kengere* or *nyabisagwa*. The latter is drawn from the fact that during this famine, people were forced to eat *ebisagwa*, immature green sorghum grain boiled in lick-salt. District Annual Reports for the period argue that no deaths were directly attributed to this famine although an influenza outbreak claimed over 5,000 lives at the end of that year.

It is interesting that both the 1914 and 1918 famines coincided with the period of war in Europe. The colonial administration was already entrenched in Gusiiland and exports out of the District were active, intended to feed troops at sea. Therefore, although official records attribute these famines to drought, the colonial administration may have exonerated itself unfairly. We have already seen that during the period that the Gusii were under colonial rule, food grain was taken from them, both for free and in exchange for cash. The end result in either case is that the people had less stock and therefore any slight shift in their next harvest had to be catastrophic.

Besides the penetration of markets, Gusii oral narratives attribute the 1918 famine, locally referred to as *enchara ya oino*, to some (false) prophecy. This prophecy, attributed to a local prophetess, implored the Gusii people not to cultivate their land. She predicted that this would make the white man leave Gusiiland. Although this never came true, there is a lot of sense to it. Given that the large workforce of colonial porters and police depended on the community for food supplies, hunger would have easily driven them out. The only problem is that the prophetess did not comprehend the fact that before this workforce went hungry, all the Gusii would have starved to death since the administration had the machinery to demand food, many times for free.

Other evidence point towards the 1918 famine as a result of a drought. Rain failed and an influenza outbreak later that year made the situation worse. It is, however, also reported that Gusiiland was one of the 'African Areas' least hard hit by the famine and influenza. Instead, the Gusii to some extent benefitted economically during this period

as they sold grain to their Luo neighbours who were intensely affected by the famine (Kenya, Kisii District Annual Reports 1930). However, Maxon has argued that the years of World War 1 brought precious little benefit to Gusiiland. Noting that large demands were made on the area in terms of human resources, Gusiiland was, like other African areas, generally neglected in terms of infrastructural development and the provision of social services. To make it worse, the last years of the war were marked by the emergence of a new form of resistance to British rule (Mumboism) which was mercilessly repressed (Maxon 1971, p.116).

Nevertheless, the Gusii seem to have emerged from this period in control of the situation. Over 75 percent of the *dukas* (cereal shops at the time) closed down as farmers responded to the shortages by not selling grain. And, although over 80 percent of the Luo livestock went to the Gusii in exchange for maize, by mid 1918, the Gusii stopped supplying maize for fear that the drought, which had until then been largely limited to Luoland, would spread to their locations. Consequently, relief maize imported by the colonial administration from South Africa was brought in for sale to famine stricken areas (Kenya, District Annual Reports 1946). The fact that the Gusii were able to 'determine' when to sell and when not to sell their maize is an indication that, at the time, food security was perceived by them as their being able to retain adequate food reserves. Markets were therefore meant for surplus produce. It is also apparent that the people were able to foresee food shortages and were able to 'resist' selling what was definitely just an interim surplus.

Some food shortages had more than one explanation. According to the colonial administration, the 1931 famine was the result of excessive rainfall in the months of March to June the previous year. This situation was exacerbated by increased exports, the lower than average rainfall of 1929 and the less than abundant harvest of 1928 (Kenya, District Annual Reports 1930). However, oral narratives attribute the 1931 famine, locally known as *nyangweso* to a locust invasion following a curse. This curse was brought upon them by a son-in-law who persuaded a man known as Nyasoni to bring *chingige* (locusts) upon the Gusii to revenge the death of his father-in-law, a roadside beggar who had been stoned to death by 'mob justice'. This famine is therefore also referred to as *egeku kia Nyasoni.*

The 1931 *nyangweso* famine, one of the most notorious in Gusii history, resulted in a reversal of fortunes. A large number of Abagusii people dispersed to three places; Subaland, Kurialand and Luoland. Alongside this, some families gave away their children in exchange for food from the neighbouring Luo, Suba and Kuria communities. But some Gusii families managed to remain behind. They received emergency food aid, mainly Irish potatoes. Chiefs were directed to force the Gusii to plant sweet potatoes, and village headmen were specifically instructed to ensure that every man put a reasonable amount of land under this crop. Sweet potatoes were recommended because they could not be destroyed by the 'grazing' locusts. This marked the beginning of sweet potatoes as a common feature in Gusiiland but, partly for the same reason, sweet potatoes have remained just an emergency crop, grown only on surplus land, if at all.

In 1932, sorghum and cotton seeds were issued and 700 seedlings of oranges were imported from Zanzibar. A coffee nursery was started and sorghum field trials were expanded for purposes of identifying suitable varieties for the District's conditions. Locusts again invaded Gusiiland in 1939.

While both the District Annual Reports (1931) and oral narratives agree on the fact that nobody died from the *nyangweso* famine as it was not followed by an epidemic, the two sources tend to differ on the impact of the invasion. District reports for the period show that the Gusii suffered little and for the most part, they made profit following extensive markets among their Luo and Kuria neighbours (Kenya, District Annual Reports 1931b). This discrepancy can be attributed to the fact that famines and food shortages impact on people in a diversity of ways. While some suffer shortages, others make profits out of such excessive demand. Among the Gusii, even at the time, households stored variedly and although everybody planted each year, the quantity of their reserves and harvests was not uniform.

The *nyangweso* famine was nevertheless intense. In 1931 alone, the Gusii-Abakuria native council spent 20,000 rupees on famine relief, while an additional 21,000 bags of maize were supplied by the government to Luo Nyanza. The Luo-Abasuba Local Native Council funded the distribution and free issue of maize to those in their locations who had neither the money nor the ability to work for their food (Kenya, District Annual Reports 1931a). It is again evident that vulnerability to food shortages varied. At the time, ability to work was as good a source of food as having the money to pay for the food. The famous *nyangweso* famine lasted for one year. It was brought to an end by the final extermination of the locusts and the good rains of 1932.

It is clear that while these famines and food shortages may have been natural, vulnerability to them was not. Although the Gusii seem to have benefitted from the fact that the neighbouring communities were not as well endowed, some people within the Gusii community also suffered immensely at the same time and they even turned to these 'food importing' communities for assistance. The 'cause' of these food shortages went beyond the drought to include the level of preparedness and the processes that were ongoing among the Gusii. Hence, looking at famine and general crop failure as an act of God leaves out the human hand, the role of social, political and economic processes. Hence my question, why do droughts become famine and how is it that only certain sections of the population suffer?

Man's own making

As already suggested throughout this chapter, Gusiiland was for most of the colonial period a grainbasket. Until about the mid 1940s, Kisii District was known for and encouraged to produce staple foods for the market. But, amidst what can be described as abundant production, several people also moved into cash cropping, and although food markets became a reality, some of the accompanying changes presented new

challenges. Incorporation into the market economy can be said to have had two but parallel influences on the food situation of the Gusii. One, commercial farming competed with subsistence production in terms of resource allocation. And two, production for export widened the scope by bringing in markets as an additional source of food. In both cases, the emerging importance of outside intervention in the food needs of the Gusii became more explicit and although famines as blanket disasters (*egeku*) ceased to be, hunger became widespread. Hence, *egeku*, disaster, which implies 'things closing in for all', was no longer an appropriate term given that sources of food had since increased. Nonetheless, we cannot rule out the possibility that things have continued to 'close in' at the individual household level, in spite of these expanded opportunities.

In 1961, the Gusii were confronted with impending food shortages and unlike previous instances when such challenges were left to the supernatural, the people sought intervention. In April, the Secretary-General of the Abagusii Union wrote to the District Agricultural Officer (DAO) requesting technical assistance.[41] He informed the DAO that:

> 'whereas there is so much shortage of food in the colony and whereas the prosperity of Kisii wholly depends on crop, the Kisii tribe is now threatened by even greater danger of famine due to moth larvae destroying crop ... The Abagusii Union has taken this opportunity to request you and all members of your department to use the emergency funds to destroy these larvae as a precaution against future famine. It will cost the government less to kill these insects than to buy food for the people when food fails. This will avert famine and help every one in Kenya. Even if the money used on this will be counted as a loan, the Union is prepared to guarantee the refund of the same. This is an urgent matter and should be attended to at the earliest convenience before worse damage is done' (Kenya, District Annual Reports 1966a).

In spite of reported resistance, the Gusii saw the colonial administration as responsible for their food needs. Although the initial letter was a request to make food production possible, this degenerated into a demand for access to food, for free. In May 1961, the Secretary-General again wrote to the District Commissioner (DC) stating that:

> 'the executive committee of the Abagusii Union (EA) which met on 7th May, 1961 have asked me to write to you regarding the shortage of food in Kisii highlands. As you are no doubt aware, the shortage of food is growing worse among the Kisii tribe, and the committee of Abagusii Union is requesting you to find food and be provided to the Abagusii tribe free. We shall be glad if you will be willing to meet our delegation which intends to see you on the very occasion on May 30th, 1961' (Kenya, District Annual Reports 1966b).

In his reply to the above letters, the District Commissioner noted that the government was aware that there was a food shortage in the Kisii highlands. He, however, decided that it was not necessary to send famine relief to the District. Instead, the National Produce and Marketing Board was instructed to send supplies for sale to the Gusii people. This decision was based on the assumption that since Kisii District was part of the highlands, it was *prosperous* enough to purchase food. Vine & Vine arrived at a similar conclusion by stating that the Gusii's standard of living was higher than that of most people living in 'underdeveloped' areas. The Gusii were better fed, better clothed and had more purchasing power than most peasant farmers in North Africa, the Middle East and East Asia (Vine & Vine 1966, p.10). This attitude towards Gusiiland as a grainbasket has persisted and people living in the District have never been listed among those likely to be food insecure, largely because food security has continued to be equated with agricultural potential. While this may have been the case at one time, the continued perception of Gusiiland as a grainbasket ignores changes taking place in the District, rendering adequate food unattainable for some.[42]

What was initially a threat, aptly predicted by the Gusii people who then went ahead to seek assistance, turned out to be real. Army worms (*chingeti*) invaded the region and unlike locusts, these ones destroyed all crops, including sweet potatoes. In spite of this, the Gusii did not receive food aid and this was never to be the case even in later years. The food situation deteriorated and in his 1961 Report to the Provincial Commissioner (PC), the District Commissioner, Kisii described the food situation in Gusiiland as quite bad. He pointed out that

> 'the West Kenya Maize Marketing Board store in Kisii has got no maize, and even any other food stuff. At the time no proper harvesting would be anticipated during this season due to lack of rain. For this reason, the whole of Kisii District is on the verge of a serious famine ... North Kisii Division [North and West Mugirango, Central and West Kitutu and Borabu] is the worst hit by food shortage. There is no maize in stores and shops and although farmers had planted finger millet, maize, potatoes and they were expecting some good yields this season, most of it has been damaged by hailstones' (Kenya, District Annual Reports 1966c).

However, the reported invasion by army worms during the 1961 food shortages can only be viewed as a coincidence. This is because for about eight years running since 1954, acreage under maize alone almost quadrupled while that under millet and sorghum remained significantly high (Figures 1.1 & 4.1). And, although maize output was already undergoing a relative decline during this period, in 1961, a record 444,678 bags of maize were marketed compared to only 132,122 and 171,388 bags in 1960 and 1962, respectively (Figure 4.3).[43] Why then were the Gusii faced with such a threat that even included requesting that there be food on the market to make purchasing possible? This is because on their part, the otherwise food abundant Gusii found themselves 'suddenly' without stocks after they had sold out in anticipation of a regular harvest.

And, because the maize market and indeed the entire agricultural sector at the time was centrally organised, they needed the cooperation of those who were in-charge of marketing to be able to purchase food.[44] With poor physical reserves and nothing on the market, the Gusii's food security was in jeopardy, in spite of the money in their hands.

The interval of food shortages among the Gusii started narrowing after 1961. In 1965, the Gusii faced yet another food shortage. Although the administration, as represented by the District Commissioner, tried to deny the existence of these shortages, this was contradicted many times. For example, the District Officer (DO), North Kisii wrote to the effect that the food situation was bad. The government, however, failed to intervene directly. Neither relief food nor supplies for sale were sent to the District, in spite of the fact that the government had imported (yellow) maize from the United States of America following the countrywide food shortages of 1965 (Kenya, SP No.1 1965). Nevertheless, some of the imported maize still found its way to Kisii. A trader in North Mugirango had this maize in his shop and a bag cost about seventy eight shillings, more than 56 percent over the farm gate price offered to the Gusii by the then Maize Control Board. It is therefore no wonder that most of the people continued to find it necessary to grow their own food, as the surest way to meet their food needs.

Nevertheless, the 1965 food shortages did not impact uniformly. According to the District Agricultural Officer's assessment, these shortages were worse in the Lake Shore Locations (Luo community) and the officer expressed concern that the Luo were already buying food from the higher locations (Gusiiland) but it was doubtful if they were going to be able to continue 'feeding from the market' until the next harvest. This situation, mainly assessed in terms of crop performance and market prices, deteriorated for the Gusii as well but, levels of intensity varied. In June 1965, the District Officer, South Kisii wrote to the District Commissioner as follows:

> 'I wish to inform you that although people are on the whole experiencing famine, there is no area within the division that could be declared a 'famine stricken area' presently. There are, however, only a couple of areas which could be, in my opinion declared 'partially famine stricken areas'. These are the southern parts of Wanjare and South Mugirango, bordering with South Nyanza (Luo areas). This would continue for about 4-5 months. Should rain fall by now, there would be very little change since the crops that are mostly affected have already reached their mature stage without any fruit or cob at all. Except, groundnuts are anticipated to do well should it rain at all ... I have noticed the appearance of this year's crops in many markets in the division being sold by women at very high prices of about 12/= per tin [*debe*]. I dare say that this is a sign that by about the month of September, maize will hardly be available in granaries anywhere in most locations. Hence, a more serious famine could be predicted' (Kenya, District Annual Reports 1965a).

The 1965 food shortages eased up with the falling of ample rain and by 1966, the food situation was satisfactory. The West Kenya Marketing Board started receiving deliveries and stocks were again building up. Higher yielding maize seed was in high demand and bananas were already being exported out of the District by lorry to Nakuru and Nairobi. However, what was earlier on 'rejected' by the Gusii but recommended by the colonial government was now taking effect. Farmers in the pyrethrum growing areas were reported to have shifted away from food crop cultivation and this was of much concern to the authorities. A letter from the District Commissioner to area District Officers quoted the Agricultural Officer complaining that

> 'it is highly regretted that farmers in the pyrethrum areas are planting more of the pyrethrum and less of the food crops. The Cooperative Department, Administration and Masaba Farmers Cooperative Union are all keen to help us in the food crops planting campaign. Put across to all your staff very effectively ... please inform your chiefs, the great desire and need to encourage people to plant more food crops' (Kenya, District Annual Reports 1965a).[45]

In general, when land was still plenty and un-demarcated, the Gusii seem to have balanced growing maize alongside finger millet. Then, farmers only decided between selling or not selling. However, the shift to growing non-food crops meant that farmers had now to balance resource use, prior to cultivation. This was facilitated by the reduction in demand for maize, finger millet and sorghum on the market and the new interest in conventional cash crops, mainly coffee, tea and pyrethrum, as the only crops that could be traded in world markets. Whereas the proportion of land under tea and coffee combined remains relatively small compared to that under maize, the overall effect is still a challenge to the food needs of the Gusii. This is in terms of resource allocation, mainly land, labour and capital and, subsequent to this, the potentiality of incomes earned to serve as a fall-back opportunity.

Life without growing one's own food

Prior to the introduction of cash markets, the Gusii traded their surplus produce on a barter system. This form of exchange was fairly fixed, 'internally' generated and negotiated. On the other hand, cultivation of maize on a large scale was first undertaken in Gusiiland purposely for the 'export' market. Hence, demand was externally generated and so was price, although farmers made every attempt to resist low prices.[46] However, by the end of the war period, the colonial administration was of the opinion that

> 'the potentially rich Kisii highlands will convert to a cash economy resulting in the export of high value low bulk crops and the import of food but as yet the native

> mind is unable to envisage life without growing his own food crops now occupying land which could be put to much better use ... the policy is aimed at producing a self-reliant class of peasant farmers with £100 minimum income per annum from mixed farming utilising good agricultural practices' (Kenya, District Annual Reports 1946).

Although the Gusii had, by 1945, been engaged in markets for close to half a century, the recommendation that they convert into a cash economy was a reversal of the way they had hitherto participated in markets. Prior to this period, the Gusii were largely engaged in markets through the cultivation of finger millet and maize, both of them food crops but on a scale that allowed them surpluses for sale. Much as some of them were also now engaged in the cultivation of coffee, this was undertaken alongside staple food crops. The latter scenario came to dominate the cropping patterns of the Gusii and the purchase of staple grain continued to be associated with undertaking the undesirable, a sign that things were not going well. In later years, however, increased urbanisation introduced a new category of persons and 'feeding from the market' was now also associated with a cosmopolitan lifestyle. This element introduced some 'status' in purchasing staple food, but purchasing has remained *ogotonda*, feeding from the market. As one respondent recounted,

> 'those who rely on purchases are like birds of the air waiting for others to work, only to join in ... they are not useful because they cannot render assistance, *ogosumia*' (Field Interviews, August 1996).

But, from one food shortage to another, several households started acquiring some of their staple food on the market. This slowly changed from a one-off occurrence to a regular shortfall that is also likely to have turned permanent. The Gusii's relationship with markets transformed from an outlet for their farm produce, and therefore a source of cash income, to a source of food for some of them but one for which they needed cash. As we will see later on in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, these varying perceptions of the role of markets in the Gusii's food needs keep coming back to influence the way the people define their search for adequate food. The proposition that people in the Gusii region have a potential to acquire their food on the market while they put their land under other uses has therefore remained unattractive to many of them. At the household level, this proposal rests on several assumptions, among them, that incomes earned will be sufficient (and food markets will function). But, while there has been some effort to avoid market failure, the more significant consideration has been largely ignored, that is, that markets respond not to needs but to a pull, namely the consumers' ability to pay (Mackintosh 1990, p.43; Devereux 1993a, p.86).

Hence, what challenges face those among the Gusii who may choose a 'life without growing their own food'? We have already seen that in so doing, they become like birds of the air, but this time not because they will not be able to support kin and friend, but

because by relying on markets, they double their vulnerability, particularly if they also depend on agricultural incomes for the purchase of staple food. The returns from conventional cash crops, thus their endowment bundle, could fall below what they need to meet their food needs. In other words, their cash returns may not offer them sufficient command at the exchange mapping level. And, whether in fact there will be food on the market will depend on the 'pull' that such households will generate for traders to respond to adequately. Although Kisii is well served with market centres, several parts of the District are impassable for much of the year.[47] Therefore, in addition to a reluctance to engage in the unusual, the recommendation that the Gusii shift away from growers of their own food ignored the practical challenges that this was likely to present. This discussion is taken up further in Chapter 7 when I look at the potentiality of markets as a source of food.

Paradise lost or paradise gained

This chapter has highlighted the circumstances under which changes in the food security of the Gusii took place, and in particular, the movement towards production for the market. I have discussed some of the factors that influence how the Gusii continue to perceive their food needs and therefore how they define their food security strategies, and why cultivation has continued to take centre stage. We have also seen that whereas food shortages have always existed, they could now be less conspicuous. Hunger has transformed from a result of some 'natural' and widespread calamity, such as a locust invasion, to being an everyday nightmare for those who may not be in a position to obtain food that is otherwise available to others. The question therefore, is what may have been gained or lost in the process?

A section of the literature has argued that incorporation disorganised mechanisms that were already in existence and which enabled households to produce food surpluses, by replacing them with others that only render them incapable of meeting their food needs (Chapter 2). Discussions throughout this chapter, however, show that while there were losers during the process of incorporation, others gained. The Gusii were already engaged in some form of commodity exchange and therefore the introduction of a cash economy only expanded these opportunities. But, even at this period, we see a differentiation between going to the market to sell and going there to spend money. In addition, these commodity relations sometimes failed, as was the case in 1961 when there was a lack of food on the market, in spite of the people's declared capacity to purchase. Hence, at this point, the market caused as much uncertainty as may have been the case when the Gusii were dependent only on cultivation and were therefore constantly taking a chance with nature. On the other hand, incorporation brought about additional sources of food and eliminated the fear of natural calamities, then the most threatening of the 'causes' of food insecurity. This could be viewed in two ways. First, the availability of markets made it possible that households could augment

their food needs with supplies from elsewhere. Secondly, those who faced constraints in engaging in cultivation could make the choice of acquiring (all) their food on the market, and therefore put their land and other resources into other uses.

We have, however, also seen that the actual outcome from the processes that were taking place among the Gusii depended on how the people themselves chose to proceed. First, in spite of the 'unlimited' potential to produce, households procured varied quantities of food, and they also stocked them variously. And, even when it came to seeking and receiving assistance, people's levels of success were dissimilar. Partly for these reasons, only some of the Gusii migrated while others remained behind. Furthermore, incorporation was also resisted, both physically and otherwise. For example, whenever prices were considered too low or the people anticipated a low harvest, they often declined to release much grain on the market. But, this was only to a limited extent. People were forced to sell so as to raise cash income for several other needs, including tax payments. This further suggests that, in practice, life is far more complex than the relationships implied in the literature. The remaining chapters in this thesis centre on this empirical reality. I look at how households actually organise and experience their search for food, the relationships and discrepancies that emerge, and the choices that they have to make. The aim is to understand further how variations in command over adequate food come about, and what accounts for the differences that we observe. In Chapter 5, I look at the strategies that households have put in place to meet their food needs.

Notes

1. Vine & Vine have argued that cattle herding was so important to the Gusii that it even tended to overshadow cultivation (Vine & Vine 1966, p.9). This should, however, be seen as true only to the extent that while almost everybody cultivated, not every one owned cattle. As such, cultivation remained the central focus in the Gusii's way of life, and it was also the source of livestock accumulation.

2. While Aminga's account brings out the continuities and discontinuities that characterise the movement into markets, it should not be seen as removed from 'reconstruction by self'. As a life history account, it is a past but one that is told in the present and therefore subject to such influences as an attempt to confer meaning (Bertaux-Wiame 1981; Bertaux 1981). Nevertheless, such an account enables us to understand how external and internal influences interact. As stated by Mitchell, life history accounts, like case studies, bring out the *complexity of empirical reality* (Mitchell 1983). Aminga's account should therefore be seen in the light of living through the changes that were taking place among the Gusii at the time.

3. They were then referred to as *abana bakinerete chinsoni.*

4. Offering and sharing food centred around the assumption that those partaking could be of some assistance, at least somewhere in the near future. Much of this assistance was seen in terms

of labour. Therefore, feeding those from whom one was unlikely to benefit was likened to undertaking the impossible, *omwana obande mamiria makendu* or investing where there will be no dividends, *omwana obande sese y'mochie onde.*

5. Contracts at the Kericho Tea Estates were limited to three months, beyond which the persons were expected to return to their home areas for at least six months before being allowed to take up another contract. Although this was officially meant to allow African employees time to visit their rural homes, this regulation was actually intended to deny the workers a right to any benefits. And, by giving them short term contracts, it was more difficult for them to mobilise to agitate for change.

6. Unlike early in his marriage when he could assist his wife in cultivation by clearing the fields while she ploughed, Aminga now only takes care of his coffee and tea, which he planted in 1942 and 1964, respectively. Even then, his role is supervisory. His wife however still cultivates maize and finger millet, among other food crops.

7. Six *debes* are equivalent to about one 90 kilogramme bag of maize.

8. Commonly referred to by outsiders as cattle villages, *gesarate* was a residence away from home and away from other Gusii settlements. Here, young unmarried men spent time guarding the boarders, taking care of non-milking cattle, learning the techniques of war, and receiving cultural wisdom from elders. These places were located at the frontier (*borabu*) with other clans or ethnic groups, to protect Gusii settlements from possible external aggression. Although Aminga explained that his not going to *gesarate* resulted from his father's refusal, we also note that by the time he came of age, these cattle villages had long been outlawed (in 1912). Besides, Aminga was already engaged in off-farm employment.

9. They eventually had eight children, three boys and five girls.

10. However, what Aminga's cash earnings could purchase was subject to macro level influences. I will illustrate this with a list of fluctuations in Exchange Rates for the Kenyan Shilling to the US Dollar. In 1990, one US Dollar was equivalent to 23 Kenyan Shillings. This rose to 80 shillings in 1993, before dropping to 49 shillings in 1994. Currently, one US Dollar is equivalent to about 60 Kenyan Shillings. Except for minor annual increments, most employers do not take inflation into account, yet this has a direct effect on purchasing power, mainly resulting from the fact that many service industries depend on imports.

11. Household resources, mainly labour, were geared towards increased agricultural output. Increased demand for food arising from growth within the family was primarily met through bringing more land under cultivation.

12. Most of the virgin land was full of Kikuyu grass (*ekenyambi*). People without livestock were most unfortunate because they could not manure such land. However, those in this kind of predicament could request temporary access (*omonye*) to fertile/manured land from their neighbours so as to grow some food.

13. About 58 percent of the land in Kenya falls under the Trust Land Ordinance. This refers to customary land that is owned by the ethnic group(s) inhabiting a particular district and is held in trust for them by the respective local authority (Local Government). Most of the trust lands are found in the former 'native reserves' and this includes land that is still held under the customary land tenure system (Kanyinga 1997).

14. These were end of year festivities. Young men wrestled, women danced and so did young girls. Old men just watched, they entertained themselves. Old men only danced at their exclusive beer parties, away from women and children, as a way of keeping their authority and respect.

15. The rupee was the first currency used in Kenya before the shilling was introduced. According Edward Rodwell, the first coinage used in Kenya dates from the 12th century and they were known as 'fish scales' because of their irregular size and thinness. Towards the end of the 12th century, locally minted copper coins were in use along the coastal parts of Kenya. These are believed to have been used in exchange for grain. After the Portuguese left East Africa in the 1720s, and the Sultan of Oman turned Zanzibar into the entreport for East and Central Africa, new currencies began to circulate. Indians, Americans and Germans trading in Zanzibar introduced the rupee, the dollar and the mark. In the 1800s, 47 dollars equalled 100 rupees but trade continued to be conducted in several of the available currencies until 1882 when the Indian rupee became the official currency. By 1920, 1,000 rupees were equivalent to 100 pounds sterling. In 1922, the East African shilling came into being (Edward Rodwell, The East African Standard, Thursday February 12, 1998, p.16-17. Nairobi: The Standard Limited).

16. This was also the opinion of the colonial administration. For example, a field report stated that: 'the Kisii country still needs more roads and markets to encourage and facilitate the marketing of the surplus of cereal crops which it so readily produces. Other things being equal, the present limiting factor to the amount of produce sold is the distance the grower has to walk in order to sell it' (Kenya, Agricultural *Safari* Report 1943).

17. This is mainly because by this time, cattle villages were already outlawed and de-stocking had become policy.

18. In differentiating between local and hybrid seed, farmers refer to the former as *moragoli* seed. This then tends to suggest that what is referred to as local seed is not really the original *emekebaru*. Instead, this *moragoli* seed could well be what was initially named *rigegu* and perceived (by a section of the Gusii) to have been introduced in Gusiiland by the Maragoli people who migrated to the place about the same time that the seed appeared, hence the name. Reports from elsewhere suggest that maize was first introduced to East Africa in the 16th Century by the Portuguese, but the crop was restricted to the coastal strip (Bryceson *et al* 1997, p.2).

19. This is the staple dish of the Gusii. It is a firm but paste like stuff made from cooking maize flour in boiling water. It is served with accompaniments such as vegetables and beef stew.

20. Prior to the introduction of maize mills (also referred to as *posho* mills), the Gusii obtained flour by grinding fully dried finger millet grain between two stones (*orogena*). It was not possible

to convert maize grain into flour using similar procedures. Currently, both maize and finger millet flour is obtained by milling the grain at *posho* mills.

21. This maize flour was used in 'government' institutions, mainly to feed the large troops of porters and the police force. Field interviews also suggested that most other people that were in the employment of the colonial administration such as office clerks received this maize flour as official ration. When on annual leave, most of these employees took this maize flour to their rural homes and, it was from these returnees that the Gusii in the 'reserve' got to learn that maize too could make *ugali*. Once maize grain became widespread and *posho* mills were available, maize flour was more convenient to obtain than finger millet flour. This was before *posho* mills started accepting finger millet for milling. Soon, the popularity of maize grew faster than the number of existing milling facilities. People were frequently forced to leave their maize at the *posho* mill for several days before it was ready for collection. This situation has changed with the establishment of more and faster mills. Maize milling continues to be one of the most profitable rural enterprises in several parts of Kenya.

22. This refers to the maize that was purchased by the National Cereals and Produce Board (NCPB). In spite of the controls that existed prior to liberalisation of the maize market, some maize was also sold at the then parallel market. This was, however, of relatively small quantities due to various constraints. Following the liberalisation of the grain market, the amount of maize sold to the NCPB from Kisii has declined drastically.

23. In addition to introducing a new and 'superior' maize seed, an Agricultural Betterment Fund (ABF) was established to ensure that growers in Nyanza (Kisii included) had a single guaranteed price for each bag of grain exported out of the region. The fund was intended to compensate mostly those farmers who were far away from the railway line. And prior to the liberalisation of the maize market in Kenya, it was government policy to announce producer prices ahead of the planting season as an incentive to the farmer. However, the actual impact of this incentive is debatable. While these prices were meant to encourage farmers to put some of their land under maize as a way to guarantee sufficient supply nationally, these prices were also used to ensure that farmers who were engaged in growing export crops were not discouraged from doing so, as a result of wanting to grow their own food. Hence, in an attempt to meet these rather divergent needs, food prices remained artificially low.

24. Among the Gusii, only women can sow, weed, harvest, thresh and winnow finger millet.

25. There were two major areas of concern, competition for labour and the fear of diseases that would then spread to settler farms.

26. The drop in area under coffee after 1962 could not be readily accounted for, except for the fact that there was a change of government. It is possible that some farmers may have opted out so as to grow tea, though it is not clear how they went about this, given the restrictions that surround abandoning coffee farming.

27. Indeed, long after markets became regular and established, there were frequent incidents of men way-laying young girls (*ogokurura*), and taking them for wives. Although such girls were already known to these young men, this method was found necessary because once hijacked,

the girls found it shameful to return home and this marked the beginning of their married life. By so doing, the young men were able to counter and therefore reverse marriage procedures and in particular, the need to pay bridewealth. Although these men ended up giving bridewealth to their in-laws, this was now done at the convenience of the groom.

28. In the Gusii language (*Ekegusii*), the Luo are known as *Abagere*. This was a nickname given to the Luo by the Gusii following an observation that the Luo were keen on proportions. *Abagere* therefore means 'those who measure' (*kogera*).

29. Although these food supplies were assumed to go to British troops at sea, these troops consisted of the allied forces.

30. The extent of the poor physical infrastructure in the District is also confirmed by Gethin's account of his early days in Kisii. He explains, for example, that Kisii Town was a very small place, consisting of three government houses and four Indian *dukas* (shops). All food, drink and other items for sale came from Kisumu by government sailing boat up to Kendu Bay from where they were transported to Kisii Town on foot by Gusii young men, twice a week (Gethin 1953, p.3).

31. To facilitate exports, the colonial administration established market centres. These centres were mainly located in areas that were potentially high yielding or at border points. The establishment of these open air markets marked a firm foundation for institutionalized incorporation of the Gusii into the market economy. In 1939, a grass thatched shop opened at Manga market and for many years to come, men operated shops while women traded at open air markets (*echiro*). And to date, the Gusii somehow associate open air markets with women. Some of the other markets that flourished out of the establishment of these produce buying centres were Nyamaiya, Nyabite, Magwagwa, Kemera and Magombo (in 1944); Rioma and Nyagweta (in 1945). These points were selected because they fell in areas that were perceived to produce about 3,000 bags of maize per season within a radius of two kilometres (Kenya, District Annual Report 1946).

32. The Indians were therefore allocated land within Town and they were also provided with labourers. But, to have some control over the Indians as well, the administration did not allow them to put up any permanent structures on this land.

33. Gethin also traded in livestock and wheat. He explains that he got his wheat from Gusii farmers which he milled before selling to Indians and Europeans in Kisii and Kisumu, respectively. The Europeans in Kisumu started making bread from this wheat flour. But, this did not continue for long because wheat growing soon disappeared completely from Gusii farms (Gethin 1953, p.7; Kenya, District Commissioner's Report 1909).

34. This song, lamenting a locust invasion in Gusiiland, presents the situation prior to the invasion. The singer informs us that his mother had cultivated plenty of finger millet and the crop was extremely good. But, little did the mother know that all her efforts were going to be in vain. Locusts invaded and they cleared the entire crop.

35. See Braun *et al* 1993, p.74; Sen 1981, p.39-40; Devereux 1993a; de Waal 1993.

36. De Waal has observed that people who suffer famine think of it differently. Citing the 1984/85 famine in Darfur, Sudan, he states that the people did not believe famine implied starvation or even excess deaths. To them, famine was primarily an event in which many people's way of life suffered disruptions. De Waal therefore argues that famines are not necessarily distinct and severities correspond to their different thresholds (de Waal 1990, p.471).

37. Closely relating to vulnerability to environmental constraints, these disasters received little direct human intervention, although the people did re-organise themselves so as to adapt to the new realities. They migrated, some gave up children, while others fed on anything that was eatable.

38. Kenya National Farmers Union, KNFU Annual Reports, 1965/66.

39. In general, African dining habits shun clearing one's plate of all the food, and worse still licking it clean. Therefore, *langi* or *ogokomba* or *okomena* are indications that the person has not yet fed. This behaviour is assumed to result from a need for more.

40. Although this particular practice has been misconstrued for 'human trade', it was far from it. When people gave away their (female) children, the intention was that the family's immediate needs could be met while these children too got a chance to survive, even if away from their families. And, for those taking up such children, it was additional labour which they too required for cultivation. Moreover, these children had to be females for two reasons. One, their families knew that at marriage, these girls would have an opportunity to relocate. On the other hand, the 'host' families were more comfortable with female children, for the same reason that they would not have 'strangers' settling among them. Writing about similar experiences in Ethiopia, Rahmato argues that, what has been described as child abandonment were desperate attempts to give children a chance to live (Rahmato 1991, p.185).

41. This Union was the Gusii's first political organization. Founded in 1939, the organization sought to 'speak for' the Gusii with the aim of bringing about reforms. The purpose was to champion unity among the Gusii, promote advancement of Gusii welfare and interests and 'join the administration in solving social and economic problems wherever Abagusii may be working or living' (Maxon 1971). This union was founded by John Kebaso upon his return from Kikuyuland, where he had lived for a long time. While living with the Kikuyu, Kebaso was able to get formal education and he is said to have even undergone his circumcision while among the Kikuyu. When he returned to Kisii, he became a teacher. And, as one of our respondents recounted, because he was the only one to have the Governor's postal address in Nairobi, whenever chiefs wronged the community, Kebaso sent letters of complaint to the Governor on behalf of the Gusii. In addition to being the union's first president, Kebaso was later to become the first Gusii to enter LEGCO, the Legislative Council. African senator nominations into the Legislative Council were permitted following the Lyttleton Constitution of 1954 that provided for a multi-racial council in colonial Kenya.

42. The general debate on whether to distribute relief food for free or for pay is revisited in detail in Chapter 7. See also Sen 1990, p.44-46.

43. Maize production figures for 1961 were not available. However, a comparison of acreage for the period shows that this reduced only slightly compared to 1960 and 1962. In the latter period, 543,699 bags of maize were harvested, 171,388 of which were marketed. Therefore, given the amount of maize that was marketed in 1961 (444,618 bags), the general output may have been quite reasonable and probably not one that should have warranted such panic.

44. During this period, buying and selling of cereals was under government control and the food purchased from Kisii was exported out of the District for sale to other parts of the country and abroad. There was a practical assumption that the Gusii did not require maize on the market. Therefore, in circumstances of widespread shortages, the Gusii could only look to the government for a solution.

45. Given the existing restrictions on when confidential government records can be accessed, Archival information regarding the District's food situation was not available after 1966.

46. The inception of a Maize and Produce Control Board in May 1942 in Kisii was defended on the basis that 'low prices over the last years have resulted in some reduction of the acreage planted to maize and further without some assurance of a reasonable price to be paid, only the most intensive propaganda and pressure is likely to produce considerable increases' (Kenya, Provincial Commissioner's Letter 1942). This policy was to characterise Kenya's food policy right into independence.

47. What this means therefore is that, while the traders may show up, the consumer will have to be prepared to meet the additional cost of making such a trip inland. This partly explains why maize prices have remained relatively high in Kisii (Chapter 1).

CHAPTER 5

HOUSEHOLD FOOD SECURITY STRATEGIES AND RURAL LIVELIHOODS

This chapter focuses on household food security as practised in Kitutu Chache, Kisii District. In particular, it deals with the strategies employed to secure food. These food security strategies are analysed through the presentation of case studies and survey data. The aim is to understand how households work towards meeting their food needs, who engages in what strategy and how they arrive at these choices. I argue that the choice of strategy stems from how life chances are conceptualised and lived. Hence, although these strategies develop in relation to available opportunities, choices are made even within these limitations, and most of these choices depend on how food security is conceptualised. To a large extent, therefore, households sometimes continue to pursue strategies that do not necessarily enhance their food needs except that this is what their lifeworld can accommodate. The complexity of the issue is pursued further by looking at how specific and seemingly independent strategies actually interlock and to a large extent are embedded in people's livelihoods. The aim is to bring out the multiple realities in diverse but socially bounded practices and, in particular, how households come to grips with these life chances.

Food security strategies is used here to refer to the methods or techniques that households employ in their search for food. These strategies are conceptualised as involving an element of choice and this is demonstrated by the negotiations and trade-offs that accompany the application of any one strategy or a combination of them. While this choice may take place at the household level, inter-household networks, kinship ties and market relations constitute some of the crucial elements underlying these choices.

Identifying food security strategies

In this study, five different types of food security strategies are identified. Except for one household that had withdrawn from cultivation as a source of food, all others first sought to meet their food needs through cultivation and, on the basis of this, they proceeded to enlist one or more strategies in an attempt to accomplish this end. Whereas the importance of markets and social safety nets declined with increased harvests, the role of markets and social safety nets as options, ran side by side.

To discern patterns in the food security strategies that have been employed over the years, households were asked to enumerate all techniques that they have employed, over time, in an attempt to obtain staple food. A detailed analysis of all these strategies, namely: harvests, purchases and assistance received, was undertaken with the aim of getting a 'snapshot' view of the situation. This analysis indicated that cumulatively, the majority of households (41%) obtain their food through cultivation and purchases. A

further 32 percent substitute cultivation with purchases and seeking assistance. Only slightly less than one quarter (24%) of the households continue to pursue self-sufficiency in food as a strategy and a few households (3%) are still using seeking assistance as the only alternative to a shortfall in harvest (Table 5.1).

These households were therefore grouped into five categories on the basis of how they had acquired their staple grain over time, namely through (i) cultivation only, (ii) cultivation combined with purchases, (iii) cultivation combined with seeking assistance, (iv) cultivation combined with purchases and seeking assistance, and lastly (v) purchases only. This categorisation was based on the fact that these households had, at one time or another, utilised a specific strategy, in an attempt to meet their food needs.[1]

Table 5.1 Food security strategies pursued over the years

Source of food	Number of households	%
cultivation only	57	23.8
cultivate and seek assistance	7	2.9
cultivate and purchase	99	41.3
cultivate, purchase & seeks assistance	76	31.6
purchases only	1	0.4
column total	240	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 1995

The rest of this chapter covers each of the above sources of food. Although the case studies presented centre on a specific phenomenon, these accounts need to be seen in a wider lifeworld context. Each account might thus portray more than is covered in the theme under which it appears. The aim, however, is to understand the distinctive nature of these strategies, their patterns of interaction and commonality in practices. I assume that in addition to them being sources of food, the choice and subsequent application of these strategies is loaded with more meaning than just procuring food. I therefore focus on how households experience their search for food and, in particular, I look at who engages in what strategy, how and why. In so doing, I aim to understand how households mobilise their resources, how they resolve problems and the context in which these decisions are made.

Pursuing food security through cultivation

Entry into cultivation as a source of food among the Gusii is taken up by many rural households on marriage. Prior to this, such individuals depend on strategies pursued by their parents' households, a process that they participate in and from which they learn and perpetuate. At marriage, adult men gain access to two of the three primary factors of production, land and labour. The latter is mainly constituted by taking a wife. Although most women at marriage become a part of their mother-in-law's consumption and production unit, they soon break away.[2] This is marked by their beginning to cook separately, a period that many work towards and long for. Having one's own kitchen entails access to a separate granary, which only materialises following one's own harvest. This process is therefore effected with allocation of a cultivation site. This period could be quite long for some people. One such person was Chris' wife. She married in 1978 and for the next three years she lived and worked with her mother-in-law. During this period, she was at her mother-in-law's disposal. They worked together on the farm, they stored food in the mother-in-law's granary and they cooked jointly. When Chris' brothers also married and the father sub-divided land, his wife moved out of her mother-in-law's household. By this time their first two children had already been born.

In recent times, however, some newly constituted households with an off-farm income start off by depending entirely on markets for their food needs and only turn to cultivation when purchases are no longer conducive. There is also a third category of entry into cultivation. These are households that continue to be a component of their parents' consumption unit but are not directly involved in cultivation because they live away from 'home'. This scenario mainly arises when a newly married man who is employed off-farm takes his wife with him but continues to depend on his mother for staple grains. Such households often enter into new relationships whereby they provide remittances to subsidise production and reproduction at the rural household level while they too continue to benefit in terms of food supplies. Therefore, the period when one enters into active cultivation is dependent on occupation and access to the primary factors of production, mainly land.

Using cultivation as a source of food therefore depends on a household's circumstances and strategy. In Kitutu Chache, the number of households that depended on cultivation for their food fluctuated from year to year. Nevertheless, out of the 240 households that were interviewed, only 57 of them had continued, over time, to pursue their food needs through cultivation only. Most of these households were concentrated in Marani and Nyakoe Locations, relative to both Ngenyi and Sensi. They were mainly male headed, and over 40 percent were engaged in off-farm activities. All heads of households lived on the farm except for about 20 percent of them who resided in Kisii Town or Nairobi or other urban centres.

The priority given to cultivation for domestic consumption vis-à-vis for the market has shifted over the years (Platteau 1991; Idachaba 1991). It can, nevertheless, be

assumed that households that pursue their food needs through cultivation only, aim at self-sufficiency. This has, however, eluded some from time to time. For example, about one fifth (19%) of the 57 households that had, over time, depended on cultivation only for their food were not able to attain self-sufficiency levels.[3] In addition, only some of those who obtained harvests that were equivalent to their food requirements realised comfortable margins. This raises several questions, among them: how did some households manage to adhere to cultivation only as a source of food? In other words, who 'chose' and was able to remain in cultivation as a strategy. This and related issues are addressed in the context of Josephine's lifeworld. Josephine's account provides valuable insights as to who is likely to remain in cultivation for their sole source of food, the choices that they may have to make, and the possible future prospects that they face.

Making cultivation a source of food: Josephine's lifeworld

Josephine is an orphan. She is 26 years old and the eldest in a family of six, four girls and two boys. Their father died in 1981 and their mother in 1994. Since the death of her parents, Josephine heads the home, together with Edwin, the next sibling in line. In spite of their orphaned condition, this household has remained food secure, through cultivation. Both parents were farmers and Josephine's father was an only son in a family of two. Josephine's mother had four brothers and a sister, now also deceased. While their parents lived, the family still had enough food. The parents hired in casual labour and they participated in work groups which facilitated their farm activities. After her mother's death, a paternal cousin (a son of Josephine's father's cousin) took over the paying of school fees for the two children in secondary school. Another cousin, an older brother to their other benefactor, also assists in paying the school fees for those of Josephine's siblings who are in primary school.

Josephine may be the only one in her family who will not have much education. She dropped out of school in Class Seven to take care of her ailing mother. She now takes care of her siblings and she is also a single mother of two children, aged three and one. Josephine plans her agricultural activities with the help of her mother's brothers. Edwin completed secondary school in 1995 and in 1996, he moved to Nairobi with the cousin who paid for his education, to try and find employment.

This household is agriculturally well endowed and Josephine has the necessary exposure to farmwork. She is therefore able to carry on with the mixed farming that her parents engaged in. On the six acres, she continues to grow maize, coffee, bananas, some trees and vegetables. She also has some land under pasture. She has two cows of indigenous breed and several chickens. The sizeable amount of land that now seems to make a great difference to Josephine's production came about because her father was an only son. In a culture where every son is entitled to a share of his father's land, continued sub-division has reduced some land parcels to uneconomical units.

According to Josephine, she has always had enough food (maize). In 1995, she harvested 22 bags of maize from the long rains' crop and 16 bags from the short rains' season. This was an improvement over 1994 when she harvested a total of 34 bags of maize. But in 1994, she was able to sell 20 bags of maize compared to only 10 bags from the 1995 harvest. The ten bags that she sold in 1995 brought her an income of Kshs. 16,800. Josephine also sold 300 bunches of bananas and two bags of vegetables in 1995. Josephine sold less maize in 1995 because that year she gave some maize to one of her maternal uncles who was faced with a shortfall.

Josephine attributes her success in farming to the fact that she receives a lot of support. During the ploughing period, Josephine goes to her mother's brothers and their children (her cousins), for assistance. These maternal uncles and cousins live not too far from Josephine. They also assist with weeding and sometimes harvesting. In addition, one of Josephine's paternal cousins, the younger of the two that are also assisting in paying school fees, occasionally sends her fertilisers but, as he lives away in Nairobi, he does not attempt to follow closely what she does on the farm. Therefore, in addition to the reasonable amount of land that Josephine has access to, 'external' assistance brings her two major inputs, fertilisers and farm labour. However, in her case, labour may be her most significant input. This is because she uses local seed and technically, the difference in yield, with fertiliser application, is, if any, marginal. At harvest, Josephine shells the maize and stores it in sacks awaiting good prices. At this time, she also sends some maize to her maternal grandmother (her mother's mother).

Organisational skill is an asset that Josephine utilises very well. By sending maize to her maternal grandmother, she enhances the assistance that she continues to enjoy in the form of farm labour, and she also consolidates kinship ties that would easily fade given her circumstances. In the course of our discussion, it became evident that her late father's only sister has never been to see them since the death of their mother. Josephine's entrepreneurial skill amidst sufficient output enables her to wait for 'good prices', when she is able to sell her maize at a profit. Because good prices coincide with the hunger season, Josephine manages to 'stretch' her harvest over a longer period, which makes it possible for her to estimate what is an actual surplus for sale. Although the decision to sell or not to sell seems to lie with Josephine, the type of social networks that she has entered into are a contributory factor. Because a food insecure person is generally perceived as one who sells everything and at distress prices, Josephine dares not render 'her household' food insecure after she has been assisted to food self-sufficiency levels by a 'battery' of kin relations.

In order to generate money, at harvest time when prices are relatively low, Josephine purchases more maize which she then sells when prices appreciate. Most of the money that she puts into this trade comes from her *busaa*, or beer business.[4] From this business, she makes six hundred shillings a month. She only brews and sells once a week because the rest of the time she is busy on the farm. In addition, Josephine only sells the beer on Saturdays or Sundays when her youngest sister is home from school to baby-sit her two children. One time, when the *busaa* business did not generate enough money to enable

Josephine to continue trading in maize, she turned elsewhere. She leased out one acre of their land to generate the capital that she needed to purchase maize at harvest time so as to resell later on when prices are higher. At this time, Josephine purchased the maize at ten shillings a tin, *omotoriro*[5] and resold it for about twice as much. However, before she leased out this land, Josephine shared her 'thoughts' with an aunt. This aunt is a neighbour and she is also the mother of the two paternal cousins helping with school fees. The aunt did not object to this arrangement.

Even Josephine could easily be vulnerable to food shortages. In spite of their relatively large land holding, Josephine recalled that in 1980, the family faced a shortfall following a prolonged drought. Her parents were still alive and they were able to purchase maize using money from their coffee earnings. However, Josephine's vulnerability could possibly result from the fact that she depends, for the most part, on the goodwill of others and continued engagement in the selling of commodities such as *busaa* and coffee. Both of these may not remain steady sources of income. *Busaa* brewing is illegal, while coffee prices fluctuate sometimes to zero levels. On the other hand, because most of Josephine's production consists of factors that she is able to reproduce, she is likely to continue enjoying a food secure cultivation. However, we cannot predict whether her relationship with both her maternal and paternal cousins will continue to be dependable. According to Josephine, her paternal cousins assist her because her mother requested them for this help before she died.

In 1996, Josephine was of the opinion that the harvest was not going to be a good one. She was therefore planning to sell bananas so as to raise money to buy maize while her 1995 stocks lasted. Josephine was, however, not in favour of 'feeding from the market'. According to her, those neighbours who are perpetually dependent on markets for their staple food are irresponsible persons who sell all their maize at harvest time so as to raise money for beer. The irony is that as a *busaa* brewer, part of Josephine's success depends on this clientele.

Meeting food needs takes more than having good stocks. Josephine sometimes has to resort to seeking maize flour on an emergency basis, *egeiseri*.[6] This often happens to her when she forgets to take her maize for milling in time, or when the *posho* mill is out of order or the season is too wet and she is unable to dry her maize in time. Drying maize before milling is considered necessary because it results in better flour and little wastage during milling. Therefore, meeting food needs amounts to much more than having access to supplies. In addition to having the grain, the *posho* mill has to function and prior to this, the sun too has to shine and someone has to monitor and estimate correctly the existing stocks.

Remaining in cultivation as a source of food

Whereas cultivating one's own food has been associated with a peasant form of production which is then assumed to be inefficient and therefore responsible for

endemic hunger,[7] making cultivation a dependable source of food arises from resources at hand, life experiences and societal expectations. For example, remaining in cultivation was, for Josephine, the most practical approach to obtaining food. In addition to a fair amount of resources, it is only in agriculture that Josephine's networks are likely to continue functioning best. Her maternal uncles and cousins for instance, are only able to assist her in terms of labour. Josephine indicated that it was rare for them to give her monetary support because they themselves did not have a cash income.

Therefore, although Josephine did not quite opt to grow her own food,[8] her performance is reinforced by the fact that her parents left behind a considerable amount of land and she has continued to receive support from her kin relations in making cultivation a source of food. The labour input from her maternal uncles and cousins enables Josephine to cultivate maize on a fair scale (three acres per season) and because her paternal cousins have taken on most of the responsibilities that would have called for a cash income (school fees), Josephine is not forced to sell her maize harvest at distress prices. As such, although her own harvest of 38 bags amounted to more than four times her consumption needs, Josephine was under no economic pressure to sell the surplus. Instead, she was able to purchase additional maize from others at harvest time to resell later on when prices were better (cf Figures 1.4 & 1.5). Josephine was also able to raise money from her *busaa* business and from the sale of coffee, vegetables and bananas.[9]

Other than the resources that Josephine has access to, she uses very little technology in attaining food self-sufficiency. She has never used HYV seed, or planted in lines, and she has only applied fertilisers when they were offered free. This generates several questions, among them, why households cannot recognise the limitations that their allocation of scarce resources might be bringing about. In other words, who maximises output and who does not. Answers to these and related questions are conceptualised to lie in farm practices. This is taken up in Chapter 6.

Feeding from the market, *ogotonda*

The study area is surrounded by many markets, most of them a creation from colonial *dukas*.[10] In these places, rural households market their farm produce. Some market places are better known than others, specifically because of their history and what they trade in. In the study area, most people went to Nyakoe, Kegogi, Eroga, Marani, Manga, Eronge and Nyakongo markets to buy and sell, among other things, maize, finger millet, beans, sorghum, vegetables, livestock, poultry and bananas. There is a tendency to make purchases at nearby markets, most of them (94%) within walking distance. However, other people travel far, some of them covering up to 90 kilometres. Most of those who go this far are traders. Visits to the market are very regular and most (78%) people were last at a market in December, the same month that this survey was conducted. The rest were concentrated in the period between August and November

and a few had not been to a market for six to ten months. While going to the market can be motivated by a variety of needs, purchasing is one of the most pronounced.

But, when households turn to the market to purchase maize, they are engaged in a different practice, they are 'feeding from the market', *ogotonda*. In essence, *ogotonda* really means spending cash income on staple food. This includes purchases that are made outside a designated marketplace, such as within homes. When the market became a major player in Gusii agriculture (Chapter 4), purchasing for resale (trading) and feeding from the market out of choice were both referred to as *okogora*.[11] The Gusii have since continued to differentiate the use of markets as a source of staple food on the basis of choice. Over 73 percent of the households had once or several times before, relied on the market to supplement food harvests. As already indicated in Chapter 4, the market was not a major source of food among the Gusii as long as 'times were good'. Even when there were shortages, the Gusii for the most part engaged in selling grain to their food deficient neighbours. Increasingly, however, self-sufficiency levels eroded for the Gusii and with reducing land size (among other transformations), people started making new choices. Some of these choices included depending on the market for staple grain.

Households that engaged in purchasing food could be divided into three: those who combined cultivation with purchasing and seeking assistance; those who depended on markets as the only source to supplement cultivation; and a third category consisting of households that depended on purchases only. Below, I discuss households that supplemented cultivation with markets but make reference also to the category of households that engaged in cultivation, purchasing and seeking assistance, which, together with the third category of households, I cover in detail later on in this chapter.

Enroling markets: Chris' convictions reversed in practice

Although staple grain was not on the list of what was found 'acceptable' for purchase, markets have 'slipped in' and gradually, many households now resort to them as an occasional source of staple food. However, while it is sometimes assumed that markets are taken up out of choice, mainly on the basis of a relative advantage, the following account from Chris suggests that movement towards markets as a source of food is more of a possible recourse than a planned choice, and this process is characterised by several contradictions.[12] In this section, I focus on what goes on in the selection of markets as a source of food, and the kind of relationship that those that end up purchasing engage in.

Chris is married with seven children, two girls and five boys all aged between seven and 18 years. All the children attend a nearby primary school. Chris has built himself a corrugated iron roofed house (with clay walls and mud floor). Other structures on the compound include a kitchen, a children's house and a zero grazing shed for his cattle. Although Chris' parents owned 15 acres of land, this was shared out equally between

himself and his five brothers. He therefore inherited only 2.5 acres, which he now supplements with two more acres of land that he has leased in.[13] All his sisters are married and so are three of his brothers. One of the brothers is still a student, two are farmers like him, one is a driver and the other is a plumber. Except for the student, none of his siblings went beyond primary school.

As the eldest son, Chris received land from his father in 1978, the year he married. However, his father's land was not subdivided until 1988. By this time, Chris had planted coffee (1971) and tea (1974). He planted these crops on a piece of land that he was to inherit later on.[14] In 1995, Chris had several crops on the farm. During the long rains, he put three acres under maize. During the short rains that followed, Chris reduced acreage under maize by half. On the rest of the land he planted millet, sorghum and vegetables. Throughout 1995, some of his land remained under pasture.

Chris presented himself as a livestock farmer. He has four hybrid cows which he keeps under zero grazing. These animals were purchased in 1987. In 1995, Chris earned Kshs. 23,000 from milk sales alone and he is of the opinion that at about eight shillings per half litre of milk sold, he may not need to plant maize any more. But, this activity is constrained. Chris is anxious about the lack of effective artificial insemination (AI) and veterinary services in the area are poor.[15] In spite of these constraints in livestock farming, Chris still considers maize farming a waste of resources, 'you can use expensive inputs (HYV seeds and fertilisers) and the crop fails'. In August 1996, his maize cobs started rotting while still in the fields following a pest attack that made their leaves drop. But he was also quick to note that he has continued to grow maize because it is a staple food. He finds Irish potatoes too light and finger millet has become less attractive in spite of being the traditional staple food of the Gusii. He explained that only a few people still know how to tend the crop and they are not willing to put in the time and energy required to prepare land, sow, weed and harvest finger millet. In addition, although finger millet stores well, his children do not like it on a continuous basis, except during a hunger period.

Much as maize farming is frustrating to Chris and he already realises that he possibly makes losses, he still continues to engage in its cultivation for the 'simple' reason that it is a staple food. He meets any shortfall on the market. Chris' explanation for continuing to grow maize hinges on the social dimension of a good farmer among the Gusii. Perpetuated through the years, farming has remained synonymous with staple food cultivation and success is then measured in terms of one's ability to meet food needs on-farm. It is for this reason that most farmers do not look at the economics of maize (food) cultivation, although they will apply these principles to the cultivation of conventional cash crops, such as coffee and tea. Therefore, much as Chris fits the description of a 'modern farmer', well in touch with new techniques of livestock rearing, and has been producing for the market since 1971, he still cannot rid himself of the 'social' perception of food security and fully link up with markets. There is a deliberate struggle to 'resist' markets, and income *per se* is not the only reason impeding the utilisation of markets as a source of food. This is further demonstrated by the unfolding

of events in Chris' own household. In 1995, Chris attained a position of food self-sufficiency with a surplus. He harvested 12 bags of maize from the long rains and four bags from the short rains. At the same time, he harvested about a quarter of a bag of finger millet.

Whereas Chris states that he is not against markets, his farm decisions continue to keep markets at bay. For example, he started leasing land in 1978 so that he could grow cabbages and tomatoes for the market (as most of his own piece of land was already under tea and coffee). But when his wife established her own kitchen towards the end of 1980 as required by custom, Chris discontinued cultivating these crops for the market so that he could make some land available for growing their own maize. Chris explains that he could not lease additional land for maize because of labour constraints, since only he and his wife work on the farm. He has never used hired labour. That purchasing is only a recourse for Chris is further evidenced by measures he put in place to counter a possible crop failure in 1996. Since that year's harvest did not look promising, he had already planted sweet potatoes, and he was preparing to plant maize during the short rains in order to make up for the imminent failure of the main season's crop.

Hence, despite the fact that Chris is of the opinion that he can afford to buy his food, entry into markets for food has remained incidental for him. He faced his first food shortfall as an independent farmer in 1980 when his crop withered in the fields following a prolonged drought. To make up for this, Chris purchased three bags of maize, about 50 percent of his annual consumption at the time. Food shortage was widespread in the area and people used bananas (otherwise considered a snack) continuously for lunch as they spared the scarce maize flour for supper. Fortunately for Chris, he had money with which to buy maize on the market. He explained that it was largely possible because coffee returns were still good.[16]

Relying on social safety nets: intra-household and inter-household networks

In recognition of variations in ability to balance demand with supply, there existed in pre-colonial Africa mechanisms for addressing food shortages. Among the Gusii, several forms of exchange took place with food as the instrument. Most of these exchanges were aimed at making food available either in the face of a shortfall or when a given social occasion was too demanding for a single household to handle. In all instances, these exchanges were reciprocated instantly, at a specified period or sometime in future when a similar need arose. But, contrary to Sahlins' argument that there is an economic aspect to every social relationship (Sahlins 1968, p.81), most of these exchanges among the Gusii were conducted for more than their economic gain. The existence of social safety nets elsewhere on the continent is also acknowledged, although actual practices tend to vary, especially in the area of motive (cf Richards *et al.* 1973; Cohen 1982; Raikes 1988).

Giving assistance to households facing food shortfalls at harvest existed as an insurance mechanism, to be taken up only when need arose. In other words, recourse to seeking assistance was interpreted as meaning that such a household had already run out of stocks. Despite several changes, some of these practices have persisted. But, unlike in the past when they may have functioned just as an insurance, seeking assistance has come to dominate the regular food patterns of some households. In this study, sets of social relationships are viewed as a possible source of food and become part of the options to be taken up alone or in combination with others.

The food aid networks

Food was and is freely shared among the Gusii during feasts and visits, however spontaneous. In addition to this, food also changes hands on very definite terms, among them, barter trade and 'loaning' to those who run out of stocks. Three forms of food aid are important for our current discussion. I will briefly discuss some of the salient features in each.

Egetoro is a form of assistance that enables households to celebrate feasts better. A household with a feast such as a marriage ceremony will (through the wife) call upon friends and neighbours (who are often kin relations) to help in the preparations by sending food, almost always in the form of local brew. This package, referred to as *egetoro* enables the hosts to fulfil their obligations as invitations can include a multitude of persons. Besides the material resources required to host such a crowd, this assistance also saves on labour and households are able to cash-in on the skill of some of the better brewers. This favour is returned when each of the benefactors has a similar feast, and since most of the feasts that mandate *egetoro* are rare, it is possible to cope with making returns.

But the Gusii also engage in what Sahlins describes as balanced reciprocity (Sahlins 1968, p.83). If a household runs out of flour unexpectedly, they can seek *egeiseri* from a neighbour. Most people find themselves in need of such assistance if they are not able to obtain flour for some reason or other.[17] The general practice is that at their next milling, beneficiaries will make good. In spite of its very specific nature, this type of reciprocity is no less personal than other types as Sahlins argues. People seek such assistance from persons with whom they already have a personal relationship. But, as would be expected, the nature of *egeiseri* is constantly undergoing change.

Ogosuma is perhaps the most established of these practices. Households whose stocks run out could seek assistance in the form of grain from kin relations.[18] Seeking food aid entails sending word to one's relatives that all is not well. This is made public through visits and by sending children and younger siblings to announce this need. When the person in need of food pays a visit to the relative from whom she is seeking assistance, they plainly express their anguish and this is also evidenced by the very fact that they always take with them an empty basket in which they will carry the grain. Those who

have food in stock are obliged to give a portion to the relative in need. While this is considered as a kind of debt, it is not repaid upon attaining self-sufficiency. Instead, the beneficiary remains indebted until such a time as the benefactor too is in need. Even then, the benefactor is obliged to make known (to those from whom she is seeking a 'payback') the need for assistance, as this is not treated as a debt to be repaid unprompted. Participation in giving or receiving assistance is assumed to be mutual.

However, some households have moved out of the customary way of participating by volunteering assistance. One such household explained that they sent food to a relative upon their own realisation that these people were in need. This came to their knowledge following a visit that they made to this home. In several other cases, giving assistance has become permanently one-way. One group stated that they always send food to their children, while another reported that they have always given because their beneficiaries are constantly in need. Children living in urban areas frequently supplement their tight budgets with provisions from 'home' (parents). But, they also make remittances to cover farm inputs, the education of younger siblings or for the general upkeep of their parents and relatives in the countryside. Therefore, although food assistance is presented as a debt to be repaid in similar measure, it has also been transformed into a more subtle exchange. And, unsolicited food has become a way of opening up and initiating new networks, some of which, however, still attempt to function within the provisions of seeking and giving assistance.

Building social networks

Food-based networks are built on kinship relations and almost everybody was able to name persons and relations that they deem to be their insurance, in the case of food needs. In all instances, children are a major source of this security. The other significant relations include siblings, aunts, cousins, nieces and in-laws (Table 5.2). While relatives appear as the single most important source of support in times of food shortage, the people said that they often pick on those among their kin who are likely to understand, are aware of the circumstances surrounding the problem, are within close proximity and/or are able to render such assistance. In many instances, the decision on whom to approach for assistance is based on already existing ties but seekers often go to their 'wealthier' relatives.

Other ties result from choice. Most of the networks that come into being through selection consist of persons that share several things in common. For example, Kerubo belongs to a women's work group of eight members, and all her group mates are her in-laws.[19] The youngest member is 35 years old and she is a wife of her husband's brother. The oldest of them all is Kerubo's mother-in-law, aged 70 years. Except for two persons with one or more acres of land, the rest own between one quarter and three quarters of an acre. They all have fairly large families (except for two people who have less than five children). Kerubo described most of her group members as food needy

because, as she explained, like her, they experience constant shortfalls at harvest (Chapter 7).

Table 5.2 To whom one is likely to turn for food aid

relationship	who should assist relatives (n=240) %	whom are you obligated to assist (n=240) %	who is obligated to assist you (n=240) %
children	54.2	77.0	48.0
parents	4.6	7.5	12.2
siblings	1.7	3.8	22.6
in-laws	2.1	1.3	7.3
church	5.8	3.7	2.6
government	10.4	-	2.6
anybody	13.3	5.4	-
nobody	7.9	1.3	4.7
column total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 1995

Over 70 percent of the 240 households interviewed had at one time or another participated in giving food assistance, *ogosumia*. About 35 percent had sought and received assistance, *ogosuma*. For many of them, seeking assistance was the only way that they could bridge the gap between dwindling stocks, the next harvest and/or purchasing. Most of these households combined this assistance with purchases, in addition to cultivation. A few of them, however, continued to exist in the 'traditional mode' whereby seeking assistance was the only alternative to a shortfall in harvests. The following section focuses on the latter category, those who have continued to obtain their food through cultivation while supplementing shortfalls with seeking assistance. Later on in the chapter, I will return to a discussion on households that combined seeking assistance with purchasing.

Seeking and receiving food assistance: Sabina's endeavour to keep markets at bay

Although one would assume that social safety nets would cater for the most needy in society, this is not guaranteed. Households with some of the highest shortfalls turned elsewhere while those with apparently 'minor' shortfalls sought and received assistance. This suggests that turning to assistance depends on much more than an apparent need

for additional food supplies. Whereas not everybody with a minor shortfall resorts to such help, Sabina, a 'well-to-do farmer' with enough of the basic resources, mainly land and capital, utilised several social safety nets. What made her choose seeking assistance as a strategy, when was this and how did she go about it?

Sabina is a farmer. She is 42 years old and married to a 53-year-old school teacher. They have five children aged between 11 and 21 years. Her husband is a headmaster in a nearby primary school. They live in a permanent house, standing on about half an acre of compound. In 1972, Sabina's husband inherited one acre of land from his parents and it was around this time that they married. Although his parents had more than eight acres of land, this had to be shared equally between him and his seven brothers. In 1974, Sabina's husband purchased 10 acres of land and moved out of his ancestral home to settle with his young family, some 15 kilometres away. Sabina was already growing maize, finger millet and sorghum by the time they migrated to their current home. Once in the new place, she continued to grow these food crops but this time, in combination with other crops for the market. In 1974 they planted bananas and in 1978 they put two acres of land under tea. They also started rearing livestock. They have seven cows, two crossbreeds and five *zebus* (indigenous breeds).

In 1995, Sabina harvested a total of 21 bags of maize, eleven of them from the short rains' crop. She also harvested three bags of finger millet and half a bag of sorghum. Her 1994 harvest was better. She harvested 22 bags of maize, one bag of millet and one and a half bags of sorghum. Although it could easily be assumed that Sabina's household is food self-sufficient, she stated that this was no longer the case. She explained that

> 'fertilisers are not sufficient and maize yields are low. We no longer have money for fertilisers and other farm inputs. We have problems paying huge amounts of money for university education. Since 1988, my husband has taken three bank loans to pay school fees for the children. In 1988, he got thirty thousand shillings, in 1990 he took fifty thousand shillings and last year [1995], he took an additional forty thousand shillings. Our son is attending a private university in Nairobi and most of his siblings [Sabina's children] are in secondary school. Fortunately, we receive help from my husband's brothers. They are all in some employment and they occasionally assist with paying school fees. My husband is the eldest of them all and as he was already a teacher when his brothers were schooling. He paid for their education'.

But Sabina's household has never procured staple food on the market whenever they have had a shortfall. When she faced her first food shortage in 1975, after selling all she had to pay for medical care, Sabina sought assistance from her sisters. And more recently, in 1994, Sabina sought assistance from her mother-in-law following a low harvest which she attributed to her having used a different series of the HYV seed. In 1995, Sabina faced yet another shortage. She was then forced to remove some of her maize from the fields before it was ready for harvest, *ogotobora*. In August 1996, she was

of the opinion that the long rains harvest was not going to be a good one either. She therefore intended, 'when money was going to be available, to purchase sufficient fertilisers and plant according to specifications, during the short rains crop, so as to make up for the anticipated shortfall arising from poor performance by the main season's crop'.

Despite these setbacks, Sabina is not threatened. She feels that there is not going to be a real food shortage situation in her home in the near future. This is because in such circumstances her husband has a duty to purchase food for the family. This then suggests that, seeking assistance is not an indication that everything else has closed in. As is evident and even acknowledged by Sabina, her husband is able to purchase grain for them if such a need were to arise. In other words, markets are the very last resort for her, even when theoretically, purchasing should be Sabina's first option. Her husband is on a salary as a teacher, and they also earn considerable returns from the sale of tea, among other farm produce. However the demands on their cash income is great.

Sabina's networks extend beyond the village. She often sends maize (unsolicited) to her sister and sisters-in-law (husband's sisters). In 1995 she sent three *debes* of maize to a sister working in Nairobi. The same year, Sabina faced a food shortage herself, but she did not turn to her networks. This is because she had sought assistance only the year before and was still 'indebted' in food. The rest of her networks could not reciprocate since they are urban dwellers, but, by nurturing such ties, Sabina is assured of her son's safety while taking university studies in Nairobi, 400 kilometres away. Sabina had therefore to look elsewhere for a solution. She was able to harvest some maize ahead of time, *ogotobora*. Hence, de-linking from seeking assistance is not necessarily an indication that a particular household's food position has improved. In many instances, it is because mechanisms regulating the utilisation of social safety nets do not permit, and there is an alternative at hand.

However, Sabina feels that people are becoming more and more inward looking. Children no longer eat in other people's houses and farm implements such as *pangas* (machetes) and *jembes* (hoes) are no longer shared in the village as they used to be. But despite this Sabina keeps her own networks alive. She still gives maize flour to neighbours (*egeiseri*), which they have to return to the same measure. She laments that on some occasions neighbours have given her flour and said that she need not return it. This, she says, has implications for future relations and she has not taken it kindly in the past. She explained that by so doing, these friends make it impossible for her to go back, should such a need recur. On the other hand, those who have indicated to their beneficiaries that it was not necessary to return the favour argued that they did not see the point in expecting 'a small bowl of flour back from a friend'. Sabina also receives other foods such as vegetables from neighbours and friends and these are non-refundable gifts. However, as she points out, people are increasingly selling vegetables within their homes, hence what goes for free depends on the relationship between the two persons. If Sabina wants vegetables from a friend who grows them for the market,

she sends her child with the necessary money and it is up to the friend to accept or decline taking payment.[20]

Sabina's account suggests that to benefit from social safety nets one has to nurture relations and there is a code of conduct to be obeyed. Therefore, while Sabina was still indebted, she could not turn to her mother-in-law. Although it is possible that her mother-in-law would not turn her down, let alone her sisters, there is some dignity attached to respecting this code. Hence, Sabina preferred to seek her food elsewhere, she resorted to hastening the harvest. We also observe that Sabina's networks were founded on already existing kin relations which she sustains not only by keeping to the rules but, most importantly, by keeping them alive through participation. Although I have argued that social safety nets tend towards benefiting households with the least deficit, while leaving out the most needy, Sabina's case shows that, like many other areas of life, it is an investment. But, in sending food to the sister living in town, Sabina has developed these networks in 'new' directions. Therefore, as opposed to seeing the demise of social safety nets, we see their purpose extended.[21]

Combining purchases with assistance

In the event of a shortfall, the decision to turn to markets and/or social safety nets is made according to circumstances. Some households first sought assistance and then moved on to purchase if they still had a deficit while others followed the reverse order. In general, however, households that combined purchasing with seeking assistance turned to social safety nets earlier than markets. Seventy six of the 240 households (32%) supplemented cultivation by seeking assistance combined with buying, making it the second most applied supplementary source of food after purchasing.

Grappling with a multiplicity of strategies: Yobensiah's experiences

The combination of markets with social safety nets as sources of food is really an attempt to draw from both worlds, the commoditised and the non-commoditised. Who draws on this combination, how, when and with what implications are central concerns to the overall study question on how some households succeed while others fail. These issues are addressed in the context of Yobensiah's experiences.

Yobensiah is a mother of five children, all boys aged between eight and 20 years. She is 42 years old and married to a 48-year-old casual worker of a Farmers' Cooperative Union. They both attained primary six level of education. All their children except one, are still in school. This family lives in a corrugated iron roofed house (with earth walls and mud floor). There are three other structures in the home; a kitchen, a children's house (*saiga*) and a goat shed. Yobensiah's husband inherited 2 acres of land in 1974, the year that he married and they have, since 1990, also leased in one more acre at an

annual cost of four hundred shillings. Yobensiah's land use demonstrates a struggle to succeed at diverse but interrelated levels - food and cash crop production. With a total of only three acres of land in her hands and a multiplicity of crops, Yobensiah could not possibly escape from resorting to several sources in her search for adequate food.

Yobensiah perceives a food secure person as one who looks after her harvest well enough and does not therefore 'feed from the market'. To her, looking after food means seeing to the needs of her children and planning consumption needs so that a harvest lasts, preferably, for a whole season. This entails never selling maize, making good estimates by knowing when to cook and for whom. But, according to Yobensiah, good management does not include cooking less. This is because, in Gusii customs, scratching a cooking pot (or clearing one's plate during meal time) amounts to inviting hunger. For this reason, mothers discourage children from doing so by cooking enough. Gusii eating habits therefore dictate that some food be left on the plate to show that the person is indeed satisfied. Anything else is an indication that the meal is insufficient. Yobensiah explains that while she practises this with her children, she re-uses the leftovers instead of throwing them away, and in this way she does not find it wasteful.[22] This of course presents a dilemma between what should be an adequate food intake and when to avoid that which could be excessive and therefore unnecessary. Yet, in the absence of weights and measures and in particular the issue of calorie intake, the most innovative thing is to eat to one's fill. This has actually continued to inform common reference to hunger, whereby anything other than feeling full is seen as only relieving the pangs of hunger, and this is differentiated from having adequate food.

In August 1996, Yobensiah harvested two bags of maize from the long rains' crop. She found this harvest low and she attributed it to the fact that she had used local seed and was unable to weed in time because she did it alone as there was no money to hire labour. She also said that she did not apply top dressing as is the practice in the area. In January 1997, Yobensiah was, however, hopeful that the second season's harvest (expected in February) would be better and if not, there was still room because, as she put it, *'you never can tell God's plans'*. She did not yet consider the market as a possible solution because four of her children are still in school, two of them in secondary, and she (and her husband) needed first to attend to their school fees. School fees is usually demanding for many families at the beginning of the year because the instalments are highest then. Some of *God's plans* for Yobensiah refer to decisions that she can only take at the appropriate moment. For example, from about the time that she first entered independent cultivation, Yobensiah has frequently removed maize from the farm before it is ready for harvest, *ogotobora*. From this same period, she has also regularly sought assistance in the form of food aid from relatives. She also makes purchases with money earned from her *busaa* trade. Whenever she has to seek this assistance, Yobensiah approaches her mother and two sisters.

In spite of what looks like a generally food-needy household, Yobensiah also participates in giving food aid. She first gave assistance in 1982 when she sent one and a half *debes* of maize to her parents following a request by them. In 1994, she again gave

one *debe* of maize to one of her sisters in Nyamira District. The sister sent word that she was 'hungry' and Yobensiah had to assist her much as she herself did not have enough maize, and not too long after that, Yobensiah took refuge in markets. Nevertheless, Yobensiah's life is not just full of agricultural miseries. She has also enjoyed some bumper harvests; mainly in 1976 and 1978. During each of these periods, she still had maize in the store at the time of the next harvest. She did not stop cultivating maize, although she was able to reduce on acreage.

What then does the future hold in store for those, like Yobensiah, who must turn to several sources? This is taken up in detail in Chapter 7.

Movement towards complete reliance on markets

Depending solely on markets constitutes a rather rare occurrence. This is because of the apparent struggle to resist and sometimes even reject involvement with markets as a source of staple food. One household, however, did 'opt out' of cultivation entirely, although only temporarily. In 1995, Bathseba grew neither maize, finger millet nor even sorghum.

Bathseba is 50 years old and a farmer by occupation. Her husband retired in 1994 as a carpenter from a nearby coffee factory. They have nine children (four boys and five girls) aged between 19 and 37 years. Two of the sons are still in school and the other two are engaged in off-farm employment (one is a lawyer and the other is an office clerk). They are both married. Her eldest daughter is a single parent who lives at a nearby shopping centre with three of her five children. The other two live with Bathseba, their grandmother. Two of the remaining daughters of Bathseba are married while the youngest is a secondary school leaver, now living with her parents.

Although her husband has three acres of land, Bathseba 'owns' only the two acres which he inherited from his parents in 1948. On the one acre that her husband purchased in 1971 lives Bathseba's co-wife. On Bathseba's portion of land there is tea (0.75 acres) and coffee (0.25 acres). Most of the remaining land is under pasture. Bathseba's husband planted this coffee in 1955 but he did not grow tea until 1980. Two of her sons are already married. Their father has not subdivided land among them and they do not depend on this family land for staple grain though they occasionally get bananas and tomatoes from it. One of the sons actually sends grain to his mother. He cultivates maize on a piece of land that he has leased near his place of work, in neighbouring Kuria District.

Bathseba has been a maize farmer since 1960, the year she married. She started using hybrid seed, fertilisers and planting maize in lines after receiving advise from agricultural workers in 1962. Bathseba has never used hired labour. She explains that this has not been necessary because they own oxen with which they plough. Until 1993, when she turned to purchasing maize for the first time, Bathseba had always been food self-sufficient. However, that year, she harvested 5 bags of maize (about 30% of her

annual requirements) and this even dropped to 3 bags in 1994. The following year (1995) she opted out of cultivation. She explained that by this time her husband was already retired, but he had some money with which they purchased maize. She also received maize from the son in the neighbouring District. But Bathseba displayed too great a sense of confidence in the face of these changes perhaps. She seems only to have turned into a deficit producer recently. She has never depended on seeking assistance and she only turned to purchasing maize for the first time in 1993. She explained that this came about when she reduced the acreage under maize, following what she termed as 'changes in the family'. She now has grown up children who are employed, and although her husband is retired, he no longer pays school fees for her children and there is tea and coffee both of which require her labour. The only children still in school live with and are being educated by their two elder brothers.

But Bathseba's decision to stop cultivating maize was triggered off by other events. Although her husband is no longer paying school fees for their children, he continues to monopolise earnings from both coffee and tea, crops on which Bathseba also works. He also took another wife. At that point, it became apparent that Bathseba reduced her maize cultivation so as to devise a method of continuing to have access to these earnings. This strategy seemed to work but only to a limited degree. In 1996, Bathseba reverted back to cultivation as a source of food but this time supplementing it with purchases. It was necessary for Bathseba to continue to grow some food so as not to invite outrage from her husband. Seemingly, entry into markets does not necessarily move to greater progression towards commodity relations. This is also evident from Nyaboke's account.

Disengaging from markets

Nyaboke and her husband are a young couple. They have three children aged 12, 6 and two. Her husband works as a *matatu* (public transport mini bus) driver and until recently (1995), Nyaboke operated a family shop located in a close-by shopping centre. During the period that they were both in off-farm employment, the household depended on the market for all their maize (and other) needs. On the most part, Nyaboke relied on the shop to make these purchases and sometimes her husband assisted from his salary. Her purchases were normally sporadic and a *debe* of maize lasted them for one week or longer. Sometimes she obtained one full bag of maize at one go, when prices were good.

This situation changed when Nyaboke's husband started to build a (permanent) house at home. Soon the shop was no more and Nyaboke saw an increasing need to start growing her own food. They 'leased in' half an acre of land from a family friend, to augment their own inherited land which is less than half an acre. This friend decided to give them this piece of land to cultivate for free because he lives away from home. Nyaboke explained that her husband's salary now goes into the purchase of fertilisers

and hiring farm labour. She, however, uses traditional maize seed because she finds the hybrid expensive. They also have a dairy cow from which she earns about four hundred shillings a month. In 1995, Nyaboke harvested six bags of maize and she was able to remain food self-sufficient. However, the 1996 harvest did not look promising. She was therefore waiting for maize prices to drop around harvest time so that she could purchase some. Although Nyaboke now prefers cultivation as a source of food, she was of the opinion that off-farm employment places one in a better position to freely acquire food on the market.

While movement towards absolute reliance on markets for staple grain would be assumed to constitute completion of the commoditisation process, both Bathseba's and Nyaboke's accounts suggest otherwise. Nyaboke relied on the market for as long as it was possible and this also depended on decisions arrived at by others. When her husband decided to put up a permanent house at home (a source of prestige in the community and an indication that he was 'progressing' in the right direction as an adult Gusii male), markets could no longer hold for Nyaboke. But, the decision to close down the shop and therefore have Nyaboke on the farm could also have been based on his perception that the shop was giving Nyaboke too much autonomy. This is because Nyaboke was barely 30, living away from her matrimonial home, in a market centre and handling cash money on a daily basis. The Gusii image of an orderly home (although it is one that is fading away fast), portrays a wife as one working on the farm while her husband engages in off-farm activities. Nyaboke's return to the farm was enhanced by the fact that they were able to receive additional land at 'no cost'. However, her engagement in farming is still privileged because she has access to fertilisers, farm labour and a dairy cow that brings her a cash income.

Both Bathseba's and Nyaboke's accounts suggest that taking up markets or dropping them as a source of staple food is a decision that arises out of non-commodity relations, and much less its commercial advantages. It is still likely that Bathseba could return to cultivation as her only source of food if her access to the income from both coffee and tea was to cease being an issue. Similarly, with age, if nothing else, Nyaboke could possibly work her way back to the shop, but this does not automatically mean that she will also want to return to buying as her only source of food. Therefore, given the nature of events that make markets necessary, it is unlikely that purchasing will be taken up fully as a source of food. Instead, markets will enter into a longer term 'partnership' with cultivation in the sense that households will continue to seek their food needs through cultivation and out of choice or due to various limitations, continue to resort to markets for additional supplies. And, households that turn to purchasing so as to meet (part of) their food requirements will still consist of those who can purchase with ease and others who struggle while accessing these markets.

Food security strategies and rural livelihoods: planned options or unfolding choices

We have seen that households in Kitutu Chache pursue different but interrelated food security strategies. Using 1995 as the starting point, I have looked at how each specific strategy was constituted and re-constituted. In particular, the case studies have 'captured' and portrayed the reality around which these strategies take form, lifeworlds that shape and are in turn shaped by these same strategies. We have also seen that food security strategies depend on available opportunities and perceived constraints, and more importantly, on how life chances are conceptualised and actualised. In making choices, households contend with diverse realities and this gives way to struggles, negotiations and trade-offs. And, underlying these choices are intra-households relations, inter-household networks and ties with markets. We therefore find diversity within and between households, with no apparent sequencing regarding movement towards taking up any one or a combination of these strategies as sources of food. Following this, we also see differences amongst households that pursue similar strategies. But, no one strategy is a permanent feature of rural livelihoods. Instead, the strategies that households engage in during their search for adequate food embody a larger frame of reference and this is enacted in everyday life. Hence, in as much as the search for food is planned, it is also an outcome of a situation that evolves and on a continuous basis.

Furthermore, whereas Sen has argued that food security flows from the amount of supplies that one's endowment bundle can command at the exchange mapping level, the foregoing discussions suggest that this process depends on much more. In spite of obvious limitations, households choose how they intend to obtain their food and, how much they are able to command at the exchange mapping level depends on how these choices are executed. As such, obtaining adequate food becomes an outcome of individual manoeuvre, hence the centrality of people's livelihoods. Before continuing with the discussion on the shifts and swings that characterise the application of these strategies and processes that further impact on the ability to obtain required food, there is a need to understand what underlies the livelihoods that shape these strategies. This will form a further basis for examining whether the food security strategies that are employed by rural households result from some fixed plan, or whether they just unfold.

Contextualising food security strategies in rural livelihoods

In discussing livelihoods, Long has argued for the centrality of the concept, whose main components he summarises as striving to make a living, attempting to meet various consumption and economic necessities, coping with uncertainties, responding to new opportunities and making a choice between different value positions (Long 1997a, p.11). The strategies employed in the search for food, aspire to and are of this kind. In making decisions, households bring to bear their own perceptions and experiences on how a

given strategy will operate and the likely outcomes. Even a strategy as common as cultivating maize for domestic consumption will be variously executed and results (output) will differ and levels of success will be interpreted and experienced differently. Wallman has argued that

> 'livelihood is never just a matter of finding or making shelter, transacting money, and preparing food to put on the table or exchange in the market place. It is equally a matter of the ownership and circulation of information, the management of relationships, the affirmation of personal significance and group identity, and the interrelation of each of those tasks to the other' (Wallman 1984, p.22-23).

The search for adequate food and the choice of any one strategy is subject to who knows what, what it is that they know, what image they would want to project of themselves, and the value system informing this perceived identity. For instance, when people argue that only town dwellers engage in acquiring staple food on the market, this is an opinion shaped by the value position they subscribe to and perhaps practice. It is for such reasons that the market as a potential source of food may remain excluded from their domain. But, while this tends to suggest that the strategies households engage in are pre-determined, this may not always be the case. Livelihoods are an ongoing process and one in which 'new' ideas are always emerging. For the same reason, such emerging positions may also be abandoned for others, new or otherwise.

The strategies that people identify with are likely to change or be seen to have changed for reasons other than their technical properties. Making reference to Sahlins (1974, p.1-39) and Wallman (1979, p.7-10), Wallman (1984, p.24) rightly states that 'not everyone classifies or evaluates the same resources in the same way and any one person may not do so consistently'. For example, when a household moves into markets as a source of food, proponents of markets will view this as a (vertical) step in the right direction. But from the opposing framework, such households will be seen to be undergoing the initial stages of a downward trend to eventual impoverishment. A third perspective might view the movement towards markets as a (horizontal) decision that does not mean much unless it fails to perform its perceived function, obtaining food.

The shifts that are likely to take place in the food security strategies that households employ can be physical or they could be conceptual and affect the way people look at existing choices rather than what they actually do with these choices. In this regard, Wallman identifies time, information and identity as the other equally important elements that come into play in shaping livelihoods, in addition to the rather conventional factors of production: land, labour and capital (Wallman 1984, p.28). As stated before, rural livelihoods and, specifically, the search for adequate food entails more than making food available. The choices that households make, in an attempt to obtain this food need to be seen in a wider context, and this includes, a search for nourishment, identity and a sense of belonging. Livelihood is therefore here used to refer to

> ways and styles of life/living. It also includes therefore value choice, status, a sense of identity vis-à-vis other modes and types of social persons. It implies both a synchronic pattern or relationships existing among a delimited number of persons for solving livelihood problems or sustaining certain types of livelihoods, as well as diachronic processes. The latter cover actors' livelihood trajectories during their life times, the types of choices they identify and take, and the switches they make between livelihood options (Long 1997a, p.11-12).

Some of the forces that may contribute to changes in livelihoods include externally stimulated processes such as policy guidelines and other planned interventions. However, despite a possible uniformity in these interventions, rural households will receive and experience these processes diversely. This is evident from the following discussion on the food security strategies that have been utilised over the years among the 240 households that were interviewed. In this discussion, both entry into markets and seeking assistance are viewed as movements relative to when households first engaged in cultivation. Thus, whereas entry into cultivation largely coincides with period of marriage and is therefore subject to life cycle, this stage in the life cycle also marks the beginning of making choices regarding how to obtain food.

Movements within and between strategies

All the households that were interviewed had, over time, used cultivation as a source of food. The earliest person entered maize cultivation in 1930 and most of the households (72%) were already engaged in maize growing by the close of the 1970s. Less than 5 percent entered cultivation in the 1990s and for one of them, this was as recent as 1995. Purchasing food became an option for these households as early as 1938 but, by the end of the 1960s, less than 6 percent of the households had utilised markets. There was however a marked increase in the number of people making purchases during the period 1972-74 but, by the end of the 1970s, only slightly over one quarter (27%) of the households had resorted to markets as a supplementary source of food, although 72 percent of them were already engaged in cultivation. The most remarkable increase took place in 1980 when the number of households using the market more than doubled. Even then, one fifth of the households did not resort to purchasing staple food until 1990 and for some of them, this was as recent as 1995. Contrary to what is assumed to characterise the movement towards commodity relations (Chapter 2), the first person resorted to seeking assistance only in 1959. This increased to 8 and 36 percent by the end of the 1960s and 1970s, respectively. However, the importance of social safety nets as a source of food intensified in the 1980s and by 1989, the number of households that have at some time needed to depend on seeking assistance rose to 78 percent. The remaining one fifth of the households resorted to seeking assistance for the first time in the 1990s, some of them as recently as 1995 (Figure 5.1).

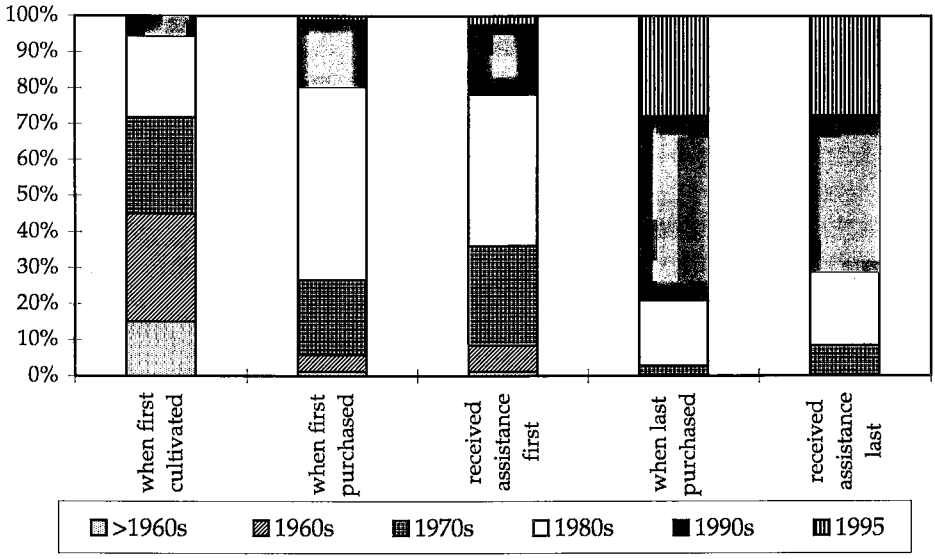


Figure 5.1 Period when each of these strategies was used as a source of food
Source: Field Survey, 1995

The application of markets and social safety nets shifts depending on the opportunities arising from cultivation.[23] In general, while some households experienced shortfalls soon after they engaged in cultivation and this necessitated that they supplement their food needs with supplies from elsewhere, this period was longer for others. Furthermore, whereas recourse to sources of food other than cultivation was temporary in some households, for others this marked the beginning of a new pattern of obtaining their food. For example, Yobensiah started cultivating maize in 1975 and the same year she faced a shortfall and resorted to seeking assistance and hastening the harvest, *ogotobora*. Since then, she has never quite balanced her food needs at harvest, except for few instances when she realised what she described as bumper harvests. However, Kerubo entered maize production in 1964 and she did not face a shortfall until 1970 when she resorted to *ogotobora*. But, since 1974, she has always faced a shortfall which she now supplements with purchases, seeking assistance and *ogotobora*. On the other hand, there were those households who only seemed to face incidental shortfalls. In 1980, both Sarah and Chris resorted to the market following a widespread drought. But, unlike Sarah, Chris has continued to buy food ever since, although on an irregular basis.

The first person 'disengaged' from markets in 1974. A cross-tabulation of the period when households first purchased maize with when they last engaged in this practice revealed that one half of the households that turned to markets prior to the 1960s for the first time were still engaged in them. And close to one third of those who first purchased their food only in the 1990s were also still engaged in purchasing. But, only about one fifth of households that first entered markets in the 1970s and 1980s were still

utilising purchasing as a source of staple food. Apparently, most of the households that had turned to markets as a consequence of these country-wide shortages emerged out of them. This is mainly because, in both periods, entry into the market was largely incidental. Several years during the 1970s and 1980s were characterised by very unique and severe food shortages (Kenya SP No.4 1981).

Similarly, while some households turned to seeking assistance only once, several others 'engaged and disengaged' from time to time. The first household 'disengaged' from seeking assistance in 1970. During this process, however, some households got 'trapped' for a longer period while others emerged from this situation the following season. A cross-tabulation of when assistance was first sought and received with when this last happened indicated that, in general, households that turned to seeking assistance earliest (1960s to 1970s) had withdrawn from this practice by the close of the 1980s. On the other hand, some of the households that entered into these relationships more recently (1980s) were still absorbed in them. This pattern is, however, not necessarily an indication that the food needs of some households could have improved. Instead, movement in and out of most of these strategies is a function of what else is going on in the specific households (cf Chapters 7 & 8).

Movements in and out of social safety nets and markets alike suggest that linking up with commoditised or non-commoditised food sources could precede each other to the extent that some commoditised relations predate non-commoditised ones. But these processes could also overlay one another in the sense that they take place simultaneously. It is, however, interesting that in a community where seeking food aid was well established (Chapter 4), some households resorted to the market for additional food earlier than when they first sought assistance from social safety nets. On the other hand, most households that remained dependent on social safety nets as the only alternative to a shortfall in their food harvest turned to this source for the first time more recently than those who had combined seeking assistance with making purchases. While this tends to support the assumption that movement towards markets only results after non-commodity relations have ceased to be, there are also indications that this does not always apply.

As pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, over time, the three sources of food have been utilised variedly both in terms of actual combination and the reasons informing these choices. Therefore, not even cultivation remained steady in practical terms, as a source of food. Nevertheless, in 1995, most households (75%) sought their food needs through cultivation only. They were followed by households that combined cultivation with purchases (14%). The rest supplemented cultivation with seeking assistance (4%) or purchases combined with seeking assistance (6%). One household (0.4%) 'opted' out of cultivation (Figures 5.2 & 5.3).[24]

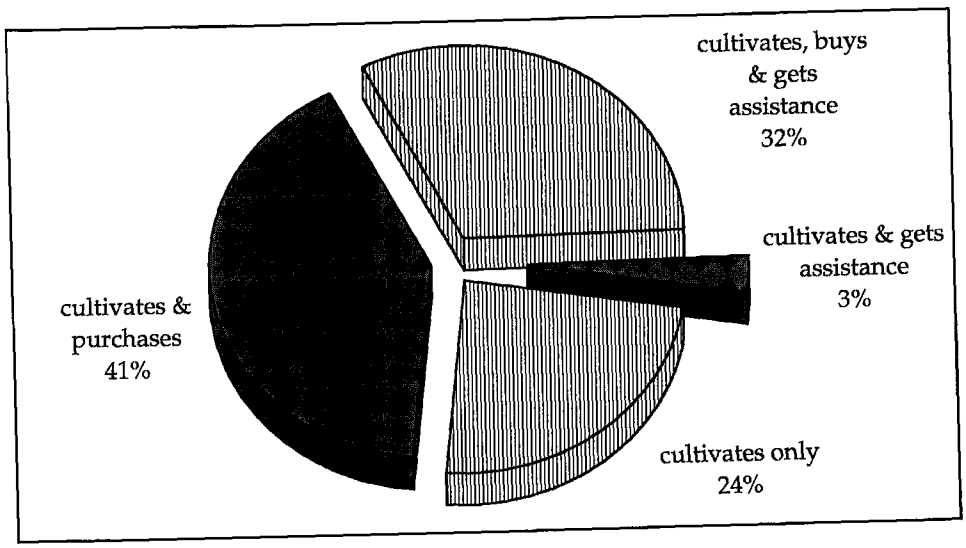


Figure 5.2 Food security strategies employed over the years
Source: Field Survey, 1995

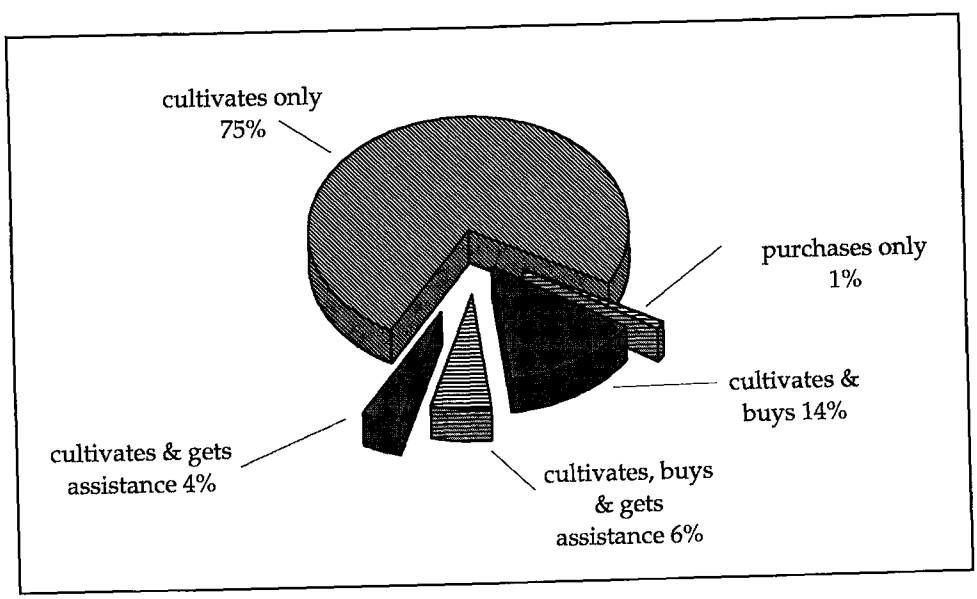


Figure 5.3 Food security strategies employed in 1995 only
Source: Field Survey, 1995

Figures 5.1; 5.2 and 5.3 clearly indicate that whereas cultivation forms the starting point in most people's search for food, and although both purchasing and seeking assistance are employed mainly as supplementary sources, there is a constant movement between these three sources of food. However, these movements follow no specific pattern. While some people first turn to seeking assistance, others resort to markets and depending on how much food they are able to obtain, they then move on seek assistance, if at all, and vice versa. Furthermore, in the process of moving in and out of any of these strategies, some people disengage fully while for others, this initial entry marks the beginning of a new way of obtaining their food.

The foregoing discussion suggests that whereas the underlying ideology remains similar, decisions and choices regarding how to secure food vary with circumstances. In order to understand, further, the kind of choices that households make as they work towards meeting their food needs, it is necessary to look at what governs these movements.

What underlies the shifts and pendulums

Throughout this chapter, I have argued that the strategies that households employ, in an attempt to meet their food needs diverge as much as they interlock. We have seen that the movement towards any one strategy depends on how the individuals concerned perceive the reality around them and how other aspects of their lives unfold more generally. Below, I turn to look at some of the dynamics underlying these movements between cultivation, markets and social safety nets as food security strategies.

Pursuit of any one food security strategy involves selecting what to trade-off. For example, to remain in cultivation only, Josephine had to restrain herself from making any erratic food sales, and by enjoying this latitude, Sabina depleted her stocks. Yet it was important for Sabina to sell maize so as to have access to some 'pocket money'. Sabina was, however, able to take such a chance because her financial base was well secured. As she pointed out herself, her husband, a school headmaster, was under obligation to purchase food for the family. But, since 1975 when Sabina first needed to supplement her food harvest, she had never turned to markets for additional supplies. Josephine's reality was different. She was not the sole decision-maker, even though the other players remained largely invisible. In addition, if Josephine were to take a chance like Sabina and deplete her maize stocks, making purchases and seeking assistance would both be difficult for her to accomplish. Her only networks were either not capable of giving her actual food or, they were already engaged in rendering her support in other crucial areas of (her) life. Her maternal grandmother and uncles could only grant her labour while her paternal cousins were already engaged in paying school fees for her brothers and sisters. Therefore, both Josephine and Sabina necessarily arrived at different decisions because of their diverse situations and commitments.

Similarly, households applied their opportunities differently. For example, Sabina was well endowed. She had 12 acres of land, an off-farm income and the possibility to hire farm labour. Even then, she chose not to pursue cultivation as her only source of food, unlike Josephine who had access to just half the amount of land as Sabina. Instead, Sabina turned to seeking assistance, so as to supplement harvests. Josephine on the other hand translated her output into adequate food because she was able to separate subsistence from her other needs. To satisfy these other needs, she engaged in different income generating activities, mainly *busaa* brewing and maize trade. On the contrary, Sabina sold maize whenever she needed cash for needs similar to those of Josephine's. In addition, Sabina sent grain to her relatives, some of whom could not contribute directly to her food production. But Josephine sent maize only to her maternal grandmother and, for this, her maternal uncles continued to save her the cost of hiring farm labour. Nevertheless, if Josephine were to pay school fees for her siblings (as in Sabina's case), her food security strategy would definitely alter. In many ways, therefore, a financially burdened household is unlikely to pursue a single strategy as the sole source of food.

And, remaining in any of the strategies is not out of chance or coincidence. For example, Bathseba was, until 1993, always food self-sufficient and this situation only changed for the 'worst' at a time when the number of people dependent on her were getting fewer. These changes were brought about by her own design and much less by a drop in yields, reducing land size or a desire to reach out to markets. With most of her children through school and employed, and for fear that she might now be supporting her co-wife with earnings from cash crops on 'her' portion of the land, whose proceeds she never had direct access to, Bathseba turned to purchasing maize as one sure way of accessing her husband's income. Yet, except for 1995, Bathseba did not depend fully on markets because she needed to 'pretend' to be dedicated to cultivation so that resorting to purchasing could remain the 'accident' that it is perceived to be, for many others.[25]

Therefore, the changing domestic relations in Bathseba's marriage necessitated her entry into markets. However, taking this 'risk' was enhanced by the security that she now has from her employed sons. But, because Bathseba needed to camouflage her decision to bring markets on board, she had to combine them with some minimal cultivation. At 50 years, Bathseba did not have to continue to prove to the community that she was a 'perfect home-maker'.[26] As it is, this point was already made because most of her children were grown and independent and, she did not engage in *ogotonda* before 1993. Therefore, Bathseba could easily trade-off her social standing as a surplus producer for a more immediate need, access to income from the family's two cash crops. This arrangement was not necessary before, because her husband was still monogamous and most important to her, a substantial amount of the money from these crops went into the education of her children.

On the other hand, whereas Chris presented himself as one who did not 'shy' away from markets, his farm activities actually resulted in distancing him from the market as a source of food. In many ways, Chris symbolises the social dilemmas that rural

households are faced with regarding devising a 'workable' food security strategy. Although most households complained about cultivation as a source of food, they actually spent the better part of their productive time and other resources pursuing cultivation as a strategy, sometimes at the expense of their overall food security. And, while markets were the most utilised of the supplementary sources of food, those who engaged in them enjoyed varying latitudes, if at all. Bathseba enrolled markets so as to settle an imbalance in resource distribution while Yobensiah was largely 'trapped' in them and, for 25 years, Sabina had managed to keep markets at bay. For her, markets remained just a possible recourse. On the other hand, there were those households that tried to keep out of markets but never quite succeeded in doing so. For instance, Yobensiah sought her food needs through cultivation, purchases and seeking assistance and, although she 'dreaded' making purchases, she had not invested enough in cultivation so as to make this transition possible. But this was no accident either. In spite of a limited land size, Yobensiah favoured cash crop production and her husband found it necessary to take up off-farm employment although they did not hire labour to replace his own on the farm. Therefore, in an attempt to engage in activities that are perceived to generate cash income, Yobensiah necessarily 'jeopardised' the chances of depending on cultivation only.

These movements suggest the existence of an element of informed choice. But whose decision is it?

Individual choices, household level decisions or socially sanctioned styles

Much as they are separate paths, we have seen that food security strategies, as applied at the rural household level, criss-cross one another and in the process, they shape and are shaped by rural livelihoods. There is, however, a dilemma as to whose decision this is, that is, who actually chooses how a household is going to secure the food that they require? The various illustrations presented suggest that this is not any one person's responsibility or privilege - just as in policy making, executors are sometimes propelled by other forces which may remain largely invisible. However, those who discharge such responsibility may also make the more critical of the decisions.

Food security strategies are, to some extent, individual decisions that are implemented by several persons. For instance, the decision for Josephine to seek her food needs through cultivation has partly to do with the fact that this was the way she knew best, it was what her parents did (with some success) and her networks (relations) could best assist her along this line. But, to continue to remain in cultivation only, Josephine brought on board other provisions that may not have necessarily been her mother's way of doing things. Unlike her parents, Josephine received great support, especially in the area of monetary aid and, largely for this reason, she remained food self-sufficient and markets were therefore unnecessary for her.

While Sarah too obtained all her food through cultivation, this decision was mainly her husband's. It was he who planned what his two wives could grow and where. But, amidst this, Sarah too arrived at her own decisions and, by leasing in additional land, she was able to cultivate finger millet and sorghum. Paradoxically, the money that Sarah used in leasing in this additional land came from her maize harvest, whose inputs were largely derived from her husband (Chapter 6). Therefore, what may look like a tightly controlled production process is indeed a shared responsibility. After providing inputs (something that has come to characterise the division of 'labour' between husbands in off-farm employment and 'unemployed' wives), Sarah's farm activities actually remained in her hands. What came to her in terms of food harvest depended on how she conducted the rest of the production, and thereafter, her food security largely hinged on how she managed this harvest. If Sarah were to bring in Bathseba's wit as a way to 'resist' decisions arrived at by the husband and which do not favour her, her household could easily resort to markets. I therefore see rural households as individual players whose goals in life, food security being only one of them, are diversely set both by themselves and also as a result of how their life chances evolve. What might, however, look like a decision taken at individual level can become a household concern that is socially regulated.

Food security strategies are influenced by what else takes place beyond the places where implementation occurs. For example, for both Yobensiah and Chris, recourse to markets had partly to do with a cropping pattern that confined them to certain by-laws and the vagaries of international markets. Having planted coffee, some of their land remained tied up, and so, how they proceeded was now dependent on these 'new components' in their cropping. But this did not constrain each of them in the same way. Although each leased in additional land in order to continue growing food, and they both planted twice a year, Yobensiah only managed to put 1.5 acres under maize. On the other hand, Chris cultivated a total of 4.5 acres during the same year. This is mainly because Chris' financial commitments were fewer and his sources of income were better than Yobensiah's.

Evidently, the food security strategies that are employed by rural households are individual decisions but taken in the context of the composition and functioning of the households and networks within and beyond which they are executed. Furthermore, the choice of these strategies is socially sanctioned and it continuously seeks such approval. Hence, food security strategies represent patterns of interdependence between kin, needs, interests and values. This process, however, is so interwoven that it can only be located in specific lifeworlds.

The challenges underlying the five food security strategies discussed in this chapter point towards the importance of understanding how the implementation of each specific strategy interplays with rural livelihoods. In the next chapter, I take up cultivation, one of the food security strategies for further analysis. By contextualising this strategy, I hope to delve further into the processes within which cultivation actually

functions and how this impacts on its performance as a source of food. Chapter 6 therefore addresses the search for food from the farm management landscape.

Notes

1. The household that depended on purchases only in 1995 had opted out of cultivation. Although this household utilised cultivation only prior to 1993, I decided to treat it as an independent category so as to explore further, the movement into markets as a sole source of food. But, as I was to learn from subsequent visits, in 1996, this respondent went back to cultivation, this time in combination with purchases.

2. This takes place after the birth of the first one or two children. This can, however, be sooner if the newly-wed does not get along with her mother-in-law. But, because such a state of affairs is frowned upon, mostly by the rest of the women folk, many daughters-in-law stay on for what is considered a reasonable period.

3. In 1995, this proportion rose to 30 percent for households that depended on cultivation only.

4. *Busaa* is the traditional beer of the Gusii. It is made from fermented maize flour. The yeast is derived from finger millet. Although illegal, *busaa* provides cash incomes to many households. Hence, one of the dilemmas even at parliamentary level is that despite its alleged disadvantages, the sale of this local brew has enabled many people to pay for their children's education. Besides, it is not even scientifically established whether the chemical harm, if any, is more potent than that of some of the sanctioned drinks.

5. This is a container, about two kilogrammes in volume, popularly used in measuring grain. It takes eight of these to make a *debe* and six *debes* add up to approximately one 90 kilogramme bag of maize.

6. *Egeiseri* is a form of emergency food aid. It is repaid back in like measure and at the earliest opportunity. See section on Social Safety Nets, for details.

7. Schultz 1964; Seavoy 1989; cf Idachaba 1991; Wangwe 1991.

8. This is because Josephine largely found herself in cultivation. Having been orphaned so early in life and since she had dropped out of school to take care of her ailing mother, Josephine took over most of what her mother used to do. She therefore continued to pursue the family's food needs through cultivation.

9. Most households that do not have a source of cash income end up making sporadic sales of some of their food harvests, so as meet other equally compelling needs, such as paying school fees. cf Heyer 1991.

10. In order to facilitate the purchase of farm produce, mainly grain, the colonial government established collection centres close to major growing areas. These centres were known as *dukas* (shops) and most of them expanded to become established market and urban centres. See Chapter 4.

11. *Okogora* means exchanging one thing for another. It specifically refers to the act of buying while selling is *oko'nia*. While this form of transaction has both a seller and a buyer clearly defined and differentiated, this is not the case in *ogotonda*, which is used to refer to the person that engages in purchasing. The person from whom they make these purchases is not defined differently from the general seller that undertakes *oko'nia*. Therefore, unlike selling, purchasing staple food is perceived at two levels, buying at will (*okogora*) and doing so because it is inescapable (*ogotonda*). Hence, in contrast to *ogotonda*, which refers to being compelled to, *okogora* suggests an element of choice.

12. cf Devereux 1993a, p.86; see also Chapter 4.

13. Chris explained that he had not leased land from people who has excess. One of these people was forced to lease his land because of illness in his family, lack of school fees for his children and a need to purchase food. The second person from whom Chris has leased land is unmarried and he lives away from home. He is engaged in lumbering and therefore has no time to work on his land.

14. The procedures guiding land sub-division among siblings are culturally defined. One is therefore likely to know where, on their father's land, their share will be located. With permission from the father, they can start developing such a portion but inheritance only takes effect when the father says so. This may be followed with a title deed once government procedures are effected.

15. Following the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) and in particular, the withdrawal of direct government subsidy to farmers, (free) veterinary services from Government have been discontinued.

16. Chris' wife did not seek assistance at this time because everybody else was needy, and they were in any case able to obtain food from the market. And by avoiding having to seek assistance, the household is under no firm obligation to give out food.

17. This could come about as a result of constant rainfall that makes drying grain for grinding difficult, or from lack of time and money or illness preventing a visit to the mill or the *posho* mill being out of order temporarily.

18. All networks involving food exchange were conducted and sustained by married women. Children, young unmarried women and men did not participate directly in initiating or undertaking these exchanges. Therefore, most of the kin relations that would count most were

those that women valued and nurtured. They tended to be their sisters, mother, daughters, mother's sisters and maternal cousins. But, this too could include husband's sisters, the wives of husband's brothers and the mother-in-law. These networks have since expanded to include non-kin.

19. In this group, they assist each other on the farm on a rotational basis. In each case, the member on whose land they work pays ten shillings to the group's account. This money is kept for one year and then shared out equally. The group also offers its services for hire to nonmembers who then pay twenty shillings per day to each group member present. Some of these groups have been used as an entry point during planned intervention. In the past, Kerubo has used her dividends from group savings to buy some 'extras' at Christmas.

20. *Egeiseri* specifically refers to giving maize flour 'strictly' on loan. In the case of vegetables, most of those that grow them for the market will accept money from friends but, they will often exchange generously in terms of the quantities that they give. Therefore, although vegetables are now exchanged for cash, the quantities that will be given for the same amount of money will vary with the existing relationship between the seller and the buyer. This, however, tends to be the case when the transaction takes place on-farm. If at the market place, there is little variation in terms of quantities exchanged for the same amount of money. The differentiation between what can be given on 'loan' and what is not refundable is associated with how the items being exchanged are perceived. In the case of cooking flour, this is a staple food and the idea behind ensuring that assistance remains a loan is to facilitate the interests of the two parties. For the person in need these ethics make it possible that she will find someone to help out. And for the beneficiary, the same rules ensure that the practice is not subjected to abuse. But in the case of vegetables, such favours are returned variedly. The dynamics surrounding variations in quantities that are exchanged for the same amount of money demonstrate the co-existence that there is between the moral and the cash economy. See also Adams 1993.

21. This discussion is taken up in Chapter 7 when I look at the potentiality of social safety nets as a source of food.

22. There are two ways in which leftovers from *ugali*, locally referred to as *ob'oro*, can be used. One, it will be used for breakfast. Secondly, it will be re-cooked by mixing it with water. The latter procedure saves on the amount of flour used for the next meal, and it also enables the people to serve the meal warm. Engaging in any or both of these practices varies with the state of food supply. During periods of plenty, *ob'oro*, which is generally looked down upon, is discarded or fed on cattle and other domesticated animals.

23. The movements discussed relate only to the first and most recent period when households engaged in any of these strategies. It is therefore possible that several other shifts took place in between these two periods. While these would have provided greater insights, they could not be captured easily.

24. Because of rounding-up, some of the percentages may not add up to 100.

25. Whereas I argue that markets are, like cultivation, a source of food and people engage any one of them or both, there is an attempt, among most of the Gusii, to treat movement towards markets as unusual. Later on in Chapter 7, I discuss why markets are feared.

26. Generally, among the Gusii, the description of a good wife centres around ensuring that one's household is fed, mainly through growing the food herself. Bathseba could however forfeit this because her other concerns were more urgent and, most of her children were grown up and independent, and she was senior in age. Women gain in authority and 'voice' as they grow older. By the time they have grown children (sons), those who want to wield some power have only their sons to fear. As for their husbands, much of it then depends only on mutual respect. While this of course varies from home to home, the reasoning mainly centres on the fact that with grown up children (sons), a woman has a right to land, in which case, even if she were to differ with her husband, she could not expect to be sent back to her parents, a fear that pre-occupied many at the time.

CHAPTER 6

SITUATING HOUSEHOLD FOOD SECURITY IN FARM MANAGEMENT

Situating household food security in farm management looks at what takes place on the farm and how this impacts on food output and the overall aim to remain food secure. I argue that food output is embedded in a multiplicity of farm practices and that these necessarily function as part of the farmers' lifeworlds - an embodiment of how households conceptualise opportunities and constraints. In an attempt to balance life chances, farmers bring on board only those facets of farm management, such as cropping and crop husbandry practices, that accommodate with their perceived reality. Consequently, the farm practices manifest in these rural households are neither 'modernised' nor 'incorporated'. Instead, commodity relations are interwoven into people's lifeworlds and the selection of any one practice is subjected to specific considerations. Hence, cultivation as a source of food becomes an embodiment of how each household conceptualises 'available' resources, a process that shapes and is, in turn, shaped by everyday experiences.

In his work on heterogeneity and styles of farming, van der Ploeg (1990) views the production process as involving the coordination of domains of farming, namely: production; reproduction; family and local community; and, economic and institutional relations. He argues that the coordination of any one domain means that the significance of specific interests, relations and parameters holding in that particular domain are carried over to other domains. On this premise, he postulates that how goals are translated into practice results in a farming style. This style defines how work must be done, advantages are weighed against disadvantages and alternatives are deliberated upon (van der Ploeg 1990, p.28-33). As such, it can be argued that farming is a way of life and as a source of livelihood (sustenance, knowledge, identity and belonging), farmers aim at much more than a sufficient output. Resources are translated into those practices that are perceived as important in realising multiple goals. However, the choice of these practices is guided by what is practicable and this is influenced by elements within and beyond the production unit.

In this chapter, I focus on who these farmers are, how they work to produce the harvests that they realise, and the nature of variations, if any, that there are between them. I argue that what could go for homogenous farm practices can result in heterogenous yields but, similar unit outputs can also follow from diverse agronomic practices. I conclude the chapter with highlights on some of the challenges facing cultivation as a source of food.

This discussion is mainly based on fourteen months of observations (August 1995 to September 1996). Taking maize cultivation as the starting point, I 'tracked' this activity, taking note of what farmers did, how and when. In addition to following

what these farmers did during a full farm production cycle (of two seasons), I also visited the Farm Management section in the Department of Agriculture, Kisii so as to be able to differentiate the actual from the recommended.

Food self-sufficiency levels

Cultivation could be a source of food in three ways. Households can grow all the food that they require and maybe with a surplus for the market or, by growing only some of their food, they can put the rest of their land to other uses and therefore supplement planned shortfalls with supplies from other sources, mainly markets. The third alternative is less practised among smallholders but it involves specialising in cultivating non-food crops with the intention of using incomes earned to acquire staple food on the market, much as those in off-farm employment are assumed to do. However, these rather separate goals cannot be easily delineated from what households practice and much less what they say. Historically, the Gusii cultivated most of their food and even when they moved into markets, much of it was to exchange food surpluses for other necessities which later on included cash incomes. Although this changed drastically when most people moved from cultivating food crops for the market to growing conventional cash crops such as coffee, tea and pyrethrum, subsistence production continued to run side by side with production for the market.

Given that nearly all households in this study cultivated some food, only two of the above three possibilities could apply, that is, households plan to grow all their food and sell any surplus, or by growing only some of it, they intend to meet the shortfall on the market, by putting the rest of their resources (mainly land and labour) into other uses. If indeed this is the case, then recourse to markets or seeking assistance should be driven by a planned choice. In other words, households with planned shortfalls in maize cultivation and those that aim at self-sufficiency levels should both still enjoy good yields deriving from husbandry practices. However, as will become evident, in Kitutu Chache, differences in food output are not necessarily a result of a planned choice. Instead, both purchasing and seeking assistance exist but only to the degree that there is a shortfall arising from less harvest or how the harvest is subsequently managed (cf Chapter 5).

For purposes of clarity, I have, wherever necessary, divided households into two groups, the 180 that depended on cultivation only in 1995 and whom I therefore assume aimed at food self-sufficiency, and the rest (59) that turned to purchasing and/or seeking assistance, in an attempt to meet what I also assume was a planned shortfall arising from harvest, sales or giving out assistance. How the latter category performed in terms of meeting this shortfall through markets and seeking assistance, among others, forms the basis for Chapter 7. Presently, I concentrate on how these two groups of households went about their cultivation. In cases where there is no

marked difference in the practices of households with 'planned' shortfalls and those that aimed at self-sufficiency levels, I discuss these activities more generally.

Food output levels and consumption needs

Almost all households put some land under maize. In 1995, 239 of the 240 households interviewed planted maize during the long and/or the short rains. A total of 3,077 bags were harvested, averaging about 13 bags and ranging between one and 65 bags. Over one half of the households (53%) harvested ten bags of maize or less and 20 percent harvested between 11 and 15 bags. Another 14 percent harvested 16 to 20 bags. Only 13 percent of the households harvested 21 bags or more (Figure 6.1). Although twenty four households did not plant any maize during the short rains, the maize harvest from this season constituted about 40 percent of the total harvest with an average of 5.8 bags compared to 7.7 bags from the long rains crop.

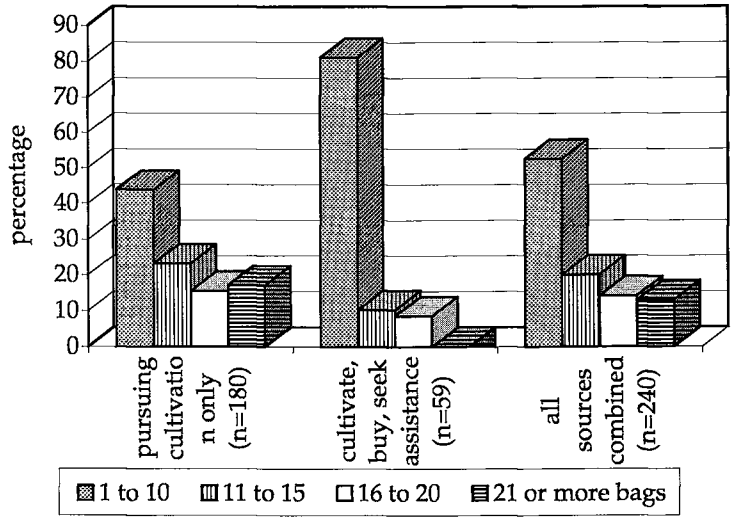


Figure 6.1 Amount of maize harvested relative to the food security strategy pursued in 1995
Source: Field Survey, 1995

Generally, the food harvests of households that sought their food needs through cultivation only were better than for those who turned to markets and social safety nets for additional supplies. Among the 180 households that sought their food needs through cultivation only, 56 percent harvested more than ten bags. Only less than 12 percent among the 59 households that turned to purchasing and/or seeking assistance harvested more than 10 bags. Indeed, no household from those that turned to purchasing and seeking assistance harvested more than twenty bags of maize,

whereas this was the case for close to one fifth (17%) of the households that depended on cultivation only that year (Figure 6.1).

Going back to the argument at the beginning of this section, there is nothing particularly problematic with these variations in food output if they are an outcome of a planned choice and the choice meets food requirements. That is, households grow only as much as they choose to have, while successfully pursuing other land and labour use possibilities which allows them to meet planned shortfall on the market. This also implies that seeking assistance does not arise during this planning stage as an alternative because it is not meant to take care of planned shortfalls (cf Chapter 4). But, these shortfalls generate concern because, for example, they were not unique to households that knew they would need to turn to markets and other sources for additional food and, the overall unit output is quite low. I will illustrate this argument by looking at the proportion of food requirement that was met through harvests, that is, how much of the households' food needs were satisfied through cultivation. In Chapter 7, I give a full account of what constitutes a 'foodbasket' and how this was arrived at.

The amount of maize that a household required for consumption was estimated on the basis of responses to a question on how long one *debe* of maize lasted each specific household. This was cross-checked with how frequently each household took maize for milling and what quantities these were. It was possible to tell the quantities because at the *posho* mill, they bill per *debe* of maize milled. On the basis of this, I calculated the number of bags that a household consumed in a year. This total was then subtracted from what actually came into the household from cultivation. Differences in food supply arising from what is obtained from harvests relative to a household's annual food demand result in a shortfall. If this, and other food gaps that might result from other encounters are not met on the market and/or through seeking assistance from existing social safety nets, then such a household faces a food deficit (see Chapter 7).[1]

Close to 60 percent of the 239 households that cultivated maize in 1995 attained harvests that were equivalent to or in excess of what they required to meet their food needs for one year. However, whereas some of these households harvested several bags of maize in excess of their food needs, most surpluses were meagre, ranging between one and four bags (Table 6.1). Some of the households that were dependent on cultivation only realised a shortfall at harvest time. On the other hand, some of those that sought additional food supplies through buying and seeking assistance were households who had obtained adequate food at harvest time. Nevertheless, the contribution of harvests to the food needs of households varied, although not absolutely, with the food security strategy that these households pursued. Table 6.1 indicates that, whereas over 69 percent of the households that depended on cultivation only were able to balance their food supply with demand, this was the case for only 28 percent among households that turned to buying and seeking assistance for additional supplies.

Table 6.1 Surpluses obtained from harvests, bags

surplus bags	depend only on cultivation (n=180) %	cultivate, purchase & seek assistance (n=59) %	overall supplies from harvests (n=239) %
shortfall	30.7	72.5	39.6
0 to 2	15.3	13.8	16.1
3 to 4	12.5	1.7	9.8
5 to 6	9.1	3.4	8.1
7 to 8	5.1	1.7	4.3
9 to 10	6.8	5.2	6.4
11+	20.5	1.7	15.7
column total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 1995

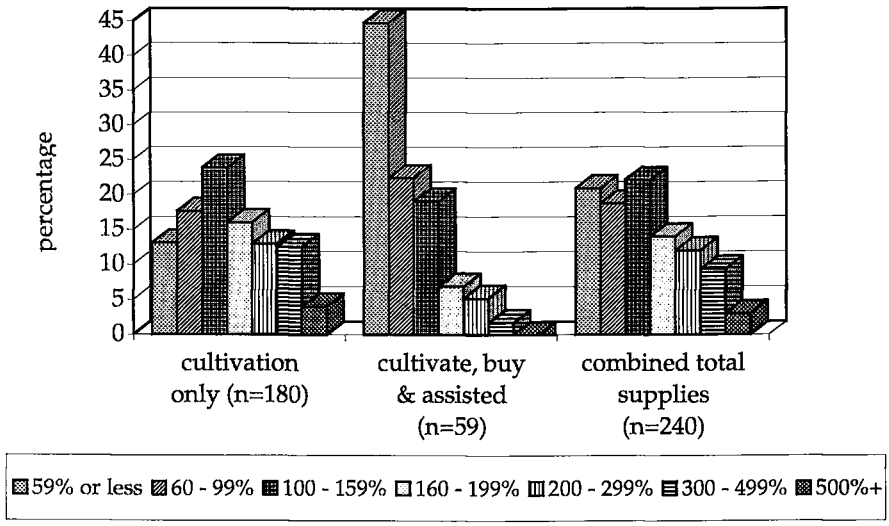


Figure 6.2 The proportion of maize harvest to consumption needs (demand) relative to the food security strategy that households pursued in 1995, bags
Source: Field Survey, 1995

Furthermore, as is evident from Figure 6.2, in terms of proportions, most of these harvests were only slightly above what the individual households concerned required to meet their food needs. For example, over one fifth (22%) of the 240 households realised harvests that were only about 50 percent over their annual consumption requirements. Only 14 percent of them approximated a harvest that was twice as much as they needed for their consumption and another 13 percent realised a harvest that was almost three times their food needs (Figure 6.2). Never-

theless, disregarding the proportions, some of the households that aimed at food self-sufficiency and those that supplemented with supplies from elsewhere experienced considerable shortfalls.

Therefore, irrespective of influences from resource allocation and crop husbandry practices (both of which are explored elsewhere in this chapter), the above discussions suggest that, the role of cultivation as a source of food is dependent on how the production process is organised. Although Sen conceptualises a successful production-based entitlement as dependent on the right to own what one grows (Sen 1981, p.2), exchanging with nature derives from much more. It is a function of how the individuals concerned interweave their experiences in the light of both macro and micro level processes. Therefore, what takes place on the farm is central to understanding the kind of exchange mappings that households face as growers of some or all their food. The rest of this chapter looks at how households in Kitutu Chache organise their 'exchange with nature' and whether this explains the potentiality of cultivation as a source of food and, in particular, the variations in harvests.

The social relations of production: a focus on farm practices

The organisation of the production process has come under scrutiny as it is seen as the basis on which rural households will experience the desired *leap* towards higher yields. This is mainly conceptualised in terms of a modernised production process, largely the drive towards commercial farming. Contrary to this envisaged 'scientific' direction, farmers have continued to adopt these technical packages in line with their own circumstances. What we therefore see is a diversity in farm practices, resulting from the interweaving of these externalities with the day-to-day experiences of farm households. According to van der Ploeg, during production, farmers define what is important which they then translate into practical procedures and both the coordination of tasks and the specific definition of each separate task become a social process (van der Ploeg 1990, p.28). As such, farm operations are unlikely to be a replica of what policy guidelines recommend. Instead, what farmers put into practice is an outcome of a diversity of experiences that come to form part of their empirical reality. For example, in spite of many years of active intervention with the aim of 'modernising' African agriculture, in Kisii District, local maize seed has continued to co-exist with the policy preferred HYV seed. In addition, the purchase of this HYV seed is sometimes forfeited in favour of fertilisers if this is what the farmer considers his best option, even when these two are supposed to be taken up as a package. This necessitates a focus on the ways in which farmers interpret and organise resources at hand, and in particular, how they arrive at the choices that they make, how they cope with uncertainty, and how they deal with the outside.[2] The social relations of production is therefore here used to refer to how farmers interweave their experiences, no matter the source.[3]

Sarah's lifeworld: balancing opportunities against constraints

Sarah's account introduces us to what takes place on the farm vis-à-vis maize cultivation. In particular, her narrative brings to the fore how farm decisions are arrived at, the constraints that people face as individuals and household units, the fears that pre-occupy farmers and the odds that they have to struggle against. We also see how technical practices are actually socially envisaged and the negotiations and trade-offs that result. This account also brings out the different forces that sometimes underlie undertaking cultivation as a source of food.

Sarah estimates that she is 40 years old. She is the eldest of Stephen's two wives. Her oldest child is 28 years and the youngest is 12. She has eleven people in her household, her eight children (two of whom live elsewhere) and a niece. Sarah's house is roofed with iron sheets and the walls are made of clay. The other structures in the home include a grass thatched kitchen (children's sleeping quarters) and a granary. About fifty metres away is another set of structures. They belong to Sarah's co-wife. This co-wife is 34 years old. She has six children aged between five and 14 years. Stephen, their husband is 48 years. He is a primary school teacher on a salary of about Kshs. 5,400 a month. When Sarah married Stephen in 1967, he had only the 2.5 acres of land which he had inherited from his father in 1960. In 1973, Stephen purchased an additional 4 acres. Both Sarah and her co-wife now live on this piece of land but they also farm the 2.5 acres 'back home' as will be seen. One of Stephen's two brothers lives on 2.5 acres of land 'back home', that is, where he came from and where his parents live. The other one, like Stephen, moved out and purchased land in the vicinity. He owns a total of eight acres.

Sarah became an active farmer in 1973. Before then, she lived with her husband at his place of work and she depended on her mother-in-law for maize. During this period, her husband provided his mother with money for inputs. In 1973, Sarah started growing her own maize when they acquired and settled on their present land. Although Sarah lives on the same compound with her co-wife, she operates independently. She tills her own piece of land, she has her own granary and her children eat only in her house. However, her husband eats wherever supper time finds him and whenever this is not in Sarah's house, she takes food to the only other place he is likely to be, her co-wife's house. But Sarah's autonomy is limited. Each year her husband shows her (just like her co-wife) where to cultivate. He also decides what is to be grown, when and where on the farm. He provides farm inputs, mainly fertilisers and HYV maize seed for the main season's crop. Stephen buys two equal sets, one for Sarah and another for his second wife. After this, each woman manages her crop independent of the other and their husband. But, these women assist each other during the peak periods, such as planting, weeding or harvesting by working on one another's land in turns. Their husband does not provide money for hired labour. From his salary as a teacher, Stephen pays school fees for all his children.

The labour demand on Sarah is high. She divides her time between working on her maize, finger millet and sorghum fields and spending three days in a week picking tea and coffee. Proceeds from both tea and coffee go directly to her husband's account. For example, Sarah explained that in 1995, she undertook land preparation in January, planted all the three crops in February and weeded them in March. In June she harvested both finger millet and sorghum and in July she started preparing land for the second maize crop. In August she harvested the maize from the long rains and the same month, she planted her short rains crop. Weeding took place in September and she harvested in January. And the same month, she began to prepare the land for the long rains crop. During this period, Sarah put two acres of land under maize for the long rains crop and a similar amount during the short rains season. The long rains crop brought her eight bags of maize, that is, 4 bags per acre. In the short rains, she harvested five bags from the same acreage. In addition, she planted finger millet and sorghum on a quarter of an acre during the long rains season. On the 2.5 acres of land 'back home', Sarah's husband put about three quarters of an acre under coffee in 1976 and in 1982, he planted tea on half an acre. Stephen's mother oversees these crops while Sarah and her co-wife provide the labour that is required to weed and harvest the crops. Stephen's mother lives on the portion of land that Stephen inherited from his father. This is because Stephen is the youngest of his mother's sons and therefore by tradition, once land is subdivided amongst all sons, parents continue to live on the youngest son's portion. This does not however entitle a last born son to a bigger share. But, such a son could benefit from developments on his parents compound, mainly residential premises.

Although the two women are exposed to similar circumstances in terms of principal tools of production, their needs vary and the production and reproduction strategies are also different. Sarah has what can be considered eleven adult mouths to feed as against her co-wife's eight, some of whom are small. But both of them have in the past hired in some more land to augment the two acres that each receives from their husband. However, in 1995, only Sarah hired land, about one quarter of an acre on which she planted both finger millet and sorghum. In 1995, Sarah harvested more maize compared to her co-wife. Out of the 13 bags of maize that she harvested, Sarah consumed seven bags and she was left with six bags. Her co-wife harvested 10 bags of maize, but she only consumed three bags and sold seven.

Whenever she has pressing needs, Sarah sells some of her maize. This she does without consulting her husband. She uses money from such sales on longer term projects such as hiring in additional land for herself. In addition, Sarah's two eldest children are already employed, one in Mombasa and another one in Kakamega. Sarah says that her daughter in Kakamega assists with several things, including paying school fees. However, the son does not assist at all although Sarah continues to send food to each of them. Sarah, however, feels that the triangular relationship in which she finds herself makes her food situation vulnerable. Most resources have to be shared among more people than would have been the case if there had been no

co-wife. Nevertheless, off-farm income enabled Sarah's husband to triple his land holding by purchasing an additional four acres. Similarly, this income continues to give him some access to farm inputs such as fertilisers and HYV seed. But, in spite of these inputs, Sarah's average unit output was only 3.25 bags an acre, in 1995. The long rains harvest was better (4 bags) compared to the short rains (2.5 bags). In both instances, her co-wife realised a worse yield, she obtained only 2.5 bags an acre.

Balancing life chances

Sarah's road to food security is a winding one. Although 'privileged' by extension, with an off-farm income and cash crops, she has to contend with several restrictions and demands. Nevertheless, Sarah's household is one of those that successfully depends on cultivation for all its food. This 'success' is as a result of her ingenuity. Although her husband provides inputs only for the main season's crop, Sarah is able to manage another maize crop during the short rains and by so doing she increases her annual maize supply by another five bags. To overcome possible financial challenges regarding farm inputs, she uses local seed and this makes the use of fertilisers unnecessary. Much as this does not enhance her yield, Sarah is still comfortable with the fact that she can harvest some additional maize. She also expands her otherwise 'restricted' cropping area by leasing in more land, and by so doing, she manages to create some room in what would otherwise have been a tightly controlled production process. The extra maize brings Sarah cash income which she needs to meet her other basic needs. She also uses this surplus maize to keep her kinship networks going. This refers to the assistance that Sarah provides to her parents and one sister. Because they are not as endowed, Sarah often sends food (maize) to her mother and one of her sisters. Although she has not needed such assistance from them, Sarah indicated that she receives vegetables and milk almost on a weekly basis from her home, which is nearby.

Sarah's account demonstrates the interplay between access to resources and food security. Prior to their acquisition of additional land, and also as a young bride, Sarah depended on her mother-in-law for staple grain. In turn, her husband provided his mother with farm inputs. The purchase of an additional 4 acres of land highly augmented the 2.5 acres that Sarah's husband had inherited, but this economic opportunity did not for long benefit Sarah only, for seven years later her husband decided to take a second wife. This event reduced Sarah's entitlements. Therefore, while augmenting land size may appear as a positive contribution for food crop cultivators, there are underlying dynamics that govern actual access and which then come to impact on the outcome in exchanging with nature - cultivation. In as far as food cultivation is concerned, Sarah's possibilities may not therefore be better than those faced by her brother-in-law's wife (husband's brother), who still has only the 2.5 acres that her husband inherited from his father.

But, even when they may have been subjected to similar opportunities, Sarah harvested more maize than her co-wife who, however, enjoyed a higher surplus. The explanation is rooted in their diverse approaches to what would appear a reasonably uniform life chance. Sarah enjoys remittances, she has a bigger labour force but, she too has a larger consumption unit - her eight children, a residing niece, her parents and a sister. Among the most salient factors to come into play in Sarah's production process are social relations, land allocation, crop husbandry practices, input application, availability of labour and her organisational skill as a farmer. I will now take each one of these factors for a detailed discussion. I focus on how access to each resource shapes and gets shaped by farm practices and how this, in turn, influences output.

Farm labour

Not every household member was a 'productive' farm worker. Most households (72%) had members who did not work on (some) crops or farmwork in general. Reasons for this were diverse. Most of the household members that did not work on the farm were children. They were 'exempt' because of being in school or they were too young or they lacked the necessary skill. But, not all adult men worked on the farm either. For some of them, this was because they were in full-time employment (30%) while for others, they were kept too busy doing other tasks around the home like tending to the fences and to grazing. One was reported to be an 'important clan elder' and could not therefore work in the fields (*shamba*). Some of the men had taken to so much (beer) drinking that they were no longer contributing to family labour. In some rare instances, there were adult females who were also not contributing to farm labour. But, unlike their male counterparts, farmwork from which women are 'exempt' was as specific as pruning coffee or tea or preparing ground for banana planting. The latter involves digging very deep trenches and this is not considered suitable for women.

Seemingly, most of the family labour consists of women and only to a limited extent are their husbands involved. This does not, however, apply when it comes to allocating farm tasks. Although there was variation in terms of who allocated farm tasks for cash and food crops, in both instances, this was more frequently done by men than women. In some rare cases, this managerial privilege was shared between husband and wife. In practice, however, the division of labour and in particular the decision making is subtle. For example, Sabina (Chapter 5) considers herself 'in charge' on their farm because as a full time teacher, her husband only provides the money to purchase inputs and pay for hired labour when 'necessary'. Sabina therefore undertakes farm work and 'coordinates' the agricultural calendar. Even then, she qualified this by stating that except for vegetables, sorghum and finger millet which fall under her domain, her husband 'looks into' the husbandry practices

of maize and tea. Sabina said that planning farm activities on her part includes reminding her husband to buy fertilisers and seeds in time for planting. She confers with him on several issues but, still considers herself in-charge because all she does is to 'share her thoughts' with her husband concerning what she intends to do. For instance, she informs him whenever she wants to sell maize to meet certain needs. She emphasised that although her husband has never stopped her from selling maize whenever she has planned to, she still informs him in the hope that he might offer to give cash for the specific need and therefore 'rescue the maize'.

Sarah's situation is however not as flexible as that of Sabina. Sarah's husband takes a more direct role in cultivation in that he takes responsibility for the coffee and tea crops. He also decides on how much land will be allocated to maize but thereafter, most decisions remain much in Sarah's hands and seemingly, she has greater (but burdensome) autonomy than Sabina. She organises her own labour within the maize farm while her husband continues to expect that she and her co-wife participate in picking both tea and coffee, the two crops directly managed by him. Unlike Sabina, Sarah's husband never pays for wage labour and Sarah cannot afford it on her own as she has no access to any reasonable cash income. Whatever money that Sarah generates from maize sales (and occasional remittances) goes into hiring additional land which she so much needs to generate cash income for other household needs. Both Sarah and her co-wife therefore depend on each other to facilitate their farmwork.

However, the organisation of farm labour goes beyond the possibility that a household has access to an off-farm income. Although both Sarah and Sabina have 'access' to off-farm income, variations in their life styles result in the diverse ways in which their farm labour is organised. With maize sales and supplementary support from her husband, Sabina is able to hire farm labour although only for specific tasks. But, it is partly because of selling maize that Sabina was not able to retain her food self-sufficiency level. While Sarah was food self-sufficient, her domestic set-up did not allow her to run the risk of selling much maize. Therefore, hired farm labour remained a luxury for Sarah. In spite of their diverse labour patterns, both Sarah and Sabina realised similar and relatively poor yields.

But, how much of a household's income goes into food cultivation depends on how the specific production process is organised. Although Sarah's husband is in employment and the family has both tea and coffee, his income was spent only on fertilisers and HYV seed. The rest of the money mostly went into paying school fees for a family of 14 children, with only two of them out of school. On the other hand, whereas Sabina's husband was faced with similar opportunities and obligations, he still spent some of his cash income on farm labour and leasing in additional land, besides purchasing HYV seed and fertilisers. The diversity in approach between Sarah's and Sabina's farm operations emanates from how farmwork is perceived within their contexts. Sarah's husband preferred to depend on labour from his two wives to tend his cash crops and generate the family's food supply. In many ways,

he was successful because the two women remained food secure without making him spend his cash income on purchasing food.

Cropping patterns: a technical procedure socially conceived

The kind of opportunities (and limitations) that households face in their search for food, and in particular as growers of their own food, largely centre around land. Access to land has therefore remained central to rural livelihoods and efforts aimed at obtaining land have sometimes been characterised by great emotion and acrimony. In the study area, cropping reflected two, but intertwined goals, production for subsistence and cash income. Conventional cash crops such as tea and coffee were grown alongside subsistence-cum-market crops, mainly maize. Hence, what governs land use and the extent to which this explains food output, is crucial to understanding the search for food within the farm management landscape. This entails looking at the amount of land that goes into maize production relative to what is available and directed to other uses and whether a higher ratio of maize provides better for the family's food needs. Secondly, I look at the implication of such allocations on aggregate output. In other words, if food cultivation is so fundamental to food security, as implied within the Gusii's frame of thinking, what do the land use patterns reveal about how households actualise their search for food? And, between cropped area and unit output, which one is of a more immediate concern to rural livelihoods in Kisii?

Area under maize

Kisii District is one of the most densely populated regions in Kenya.[4] Nevertheless, people are diversely endowed as regards land holdings. In the study area, all except two households had inherited land, ranging between 0.3 to 14 acres. In addition, 22 percent of these households augmented their land holdings with purchases of between 0.3 and 10 acres and another 40 percent leased in between 0.25 and 5 acres. In general, inherited land constituted about 76 percent of the total land available in 1995, while purchases and leases comprised 12 percent each.

An average of 4.5 acres of land was available to individual households.[5] About 50 percent of the 240 households had less than four acres of land and nearly one third of these had only between 0.3 and 1.75 acres. Over 40 percent of the households had between 4 and 8 acres, about 8 percent had over 8 acres, and this went as high as 19 acres for a few households. Most of the land was under cultivation. In the long rains of 1995, maize, the staple crop, occupied about 37 percent of the total land available to households, estimated at about 1,084 acres. The remainder of the land was under finger millet/sorghum (8%), coffee (8%), tea (4%), bananas (5%), vegetables (3%) and

pasture (7%). The rest was taken up by trees and residential structures/home compound. Therefore, although most households tended to diversify their cropping, maize cultivation took up a considerable portion of the available land.[6]

As discussed in Chapter 1, Kisii has two cropping seasons, the long rains (LR) in March through May and the short rains (SR) in October to November. Indeed, this bimodal rainfall pattern enables households to more or less double the amount of land that they can put under maize in any given year. Overall, all except one household planted maize in 1995. Close to one third of the households (29%) put less than two acres of land under maize that year and the majority (41%) cultivated between two and three acres. Less than one fifth (17%) cultivated four to five acres and the remaining 13 percent put between six and 18 acres under maize (Figure 6.3). As shown in Figure 6.3, the total acreage under maize tended to vary, although not enormously, between households that depended on cultivation only and those that supplemented this with purchases and seeking assistance. Most households from the latter group allocated less land to maize cultivation (Figure 6.3).

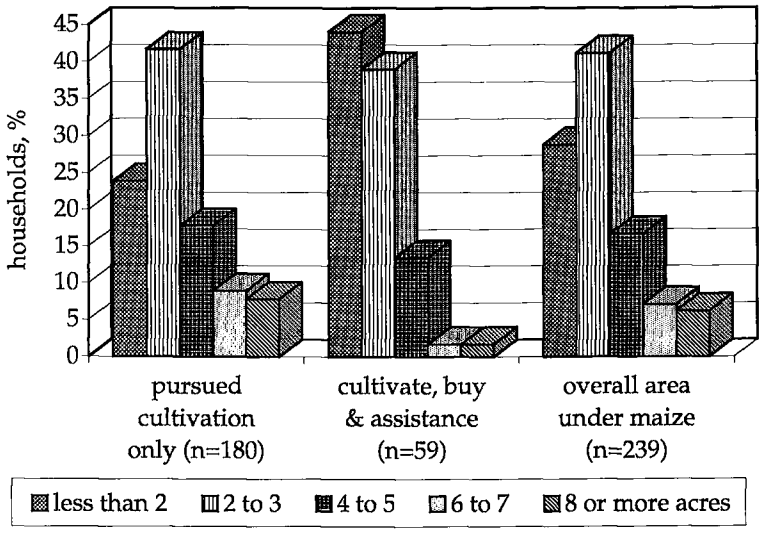


Figure 6.3 Total area under maize relative to the food security strategy pursued in 1995
Source: Field Survey, 1995

On the other hand, land under maize varied, but only slightly, with seasons. In the long rains of 1995, all except one household planted maize on land sizes ranging between 0.1 and 8 acres. About one quarter of these households (24%) put less than one acre of land under maize compared to 59 percent that cropped between one and slightly less than three acres of maize. The remaining households (17%) put three or more acres under maize, some of them going as high as 8 acres. During the short rains, 24 households did not plant maize. The rest put between 0.1 and 10 acres

under maize. About one third (31%) of the households cultivated less than one acre of maize. Over 56 percent put between one and slightly less than three acres under maize. The rest (13%) cultivated between three and 10 acres of maize.

In general, whereas households that depended on cultivation only allocated more of their available land to maize compared to those that combined food harvests with supplies from elsewhere, this was not absolute. And, although most households that depended on cultivation only were better endowed with land resources, the differences are not great. This then suggests that in addition to amounts of land owned, there are other concerns that come to determine how much land actually goes into maize cultivation, no matter the ultimate goal. In general, households with little land tended to vary their cropping as much as everybody else.

Table 6.2 A comparison of total land available to each and the number of acres allocated to maize in 1995

	total land available to each	long rains	short rains	total maize area, 1995
Josephine	6	3.5	3	6.5
Sabina	12	5	1	6
Chris	4.5	3	1.5	4.5
Yobensiah	3	0.5	1	1.5
Sarah[7]	6.5	2	2	4
Kerubo	0.8	0.25	0.25	0.5

Source: Case Studies, 1995-97

Indeed, the amount of land available to a household did not determine how much of it would go to maize cultivation. Some households with as much as eleven acres of land or more allocated only a maximum of two acres of this land to maize. On the other hand, households with smaller sizes (below 4 acres) put almost all their land under maize and with the bimodal cropping, their maize acreage superseded that of some of the larger land holders. For example, as is shown on Table 6.2, during the long rains of 1995, Chris and Josephine put about three acres of land each under maize. But for Josephine, this was only about half of what she had access to while for Chris this was almost three quarters of the land available to him that year. While this may look only sensible given that each ended up with a fair amount of land under maize, it did not apply elsewhere. Yobensiah put only one fifth of her three acres under maize that season and Kerubo allocated about one third of her three quarters of an acre to maize. Furthermore, while some households doubled area under maize through bimodal cropping, others increased this only slightly. For instance, Sarah

and Kerubo put an equal amount of land under maize in each rainy season while both Yobensiah and Chris varied this by one half and, Sabina reduced it by more than 80 percent (Table 6.2).

Therefore, what comes into play while allocating land? Again Sarah's case provides some insights. Sarah's husband planted coffee in 1976, a few years after he had purchased additional land. It was important to have coffee, particularly at this time because returns were very good. His entry into coffee growing was facilitated by the fact that he was already on a salary. In the 1980s, coffee returns were becoming relatively disappointing and Sarah's husband again sought another opportunity, tea growing (cf Figure 4.6). How much of his land could go into tea production was now dependent on a scenario that was different from 1976 when he decided to plant coffee. He had since married a second wife who also required a share of land to grow her food. Moreover, it is illegal in Kenya to uproot coffee trees and this therefore ties Stephen to the coffee trees already occupying a substantial amount of his land.[8] Apparently, these land use patterns are influenced by what goes on both locally and even internationally.

At individual level, however, Sarah's cropping patterns were a culmination of all the above processes. She had access to less than one third of the available land and on this she had to grow maize. The decision to allocate the entire two acres that Sarah received to maize cropping was her husband's and it was guided by a need, on his part, to avoid spending his cash income on food purchases as was once the case. During the 1980 food shortages, Stephen's two wives ran out of food. He purchased one bag which they shared equally and this bridged the gap until the next harvest. Sarah however managed to create some leeway. By selling some of her maize, she was able to lease in additional land on which she cultivated finger millet and sorghum. In addition, although Stephen discouraged both Sarah and her co-wife from planting during the short rains by not providing them with inputs, Sarah went ahead to do what she could. She used local maize seed for the second planting and as she pointed out, this was at a 'negligible cost' for her because it was not necessary to apply fertilisers. By so doing, Sarah had an extra crop and therefore a chance to earn some cash income without jeopardising her food needs, given that their husband, the person holding the 'family purse' was not in favour of relying on markets for food. Besides, Sarah's social networks constitute family members, mainly her mother and a sister, who depend on her for grain (even though her mother also sends Sarah some milk and vegetables). Therefore, Sarah would still want to grow (some) food so as to continue being of assistance to her parents.

What comes into play during the allocation of land seems to be a result of 'external' influences, shaped by 'internal' processes. But this could also work in reverse. Chris moved out of commercial vegetable cultivation to start growing maize for domestic consumption because his wife had since moved out of her mother-in-law's kitchen and they therefore needed to establish their own granary (Chapter 5). Because most of Chris' land was already under tea and coffee, he could only

terminate the planting of vegetables. Of course several other possibilities existed which Chris did not explore at the time, such as leasing in land. This decision has much to do with the way Chris understood the challenges facing him. Evidently, cropping patterns are not necessarily subjected to a similar and single denominator, comparative advantage.

Diversity in cropping

In order to explore further the diverse ways in which resource allocation is conceptualised, I took a sub-sample of households that were faced with 'equal' opportunity - uniform land size. I based their selection on land distribution patterns and because the majority of households had access to 3 acres of land, this group became the basis for further analysis. Only 54 percent of the 28 households that had access to three acres of land in 1995 had inherited the entire amount. The rest augmented their inherited parcels by purchasing (18%) between 0.5 and 1.5 acres. And 36 percent leased in between 0.5 and 2 acres.

In spite of having had access to a uniform amount of land in the long rains of 1995, area under maize varied between 0.5 and 3 acres. Of the 28 households, 9 of them put half an acre of land under maize, 10 had one acre, 3 had one and a half acres, 4 had two acres and only one household put the entire land under maize. Another one household did not even plant maize that year (Table 6.3).

Table 6.3 Land use patterns in the long rains of 1995 for the 28 households with 3 acres

	estimated area of land utilised, acres								
land use	none	0.25	0.5	0.75	1.0	1.5	2.0	3.0	total (n=)
maize	1	0	9	0	10	3	4	1	28
millet & sorghum	7	10	7	1	3	-	-	-	28
tea	20	4	2	1	1	-	-	-	28
coffee	10	10	7	0	1	-	-	-	28
pastures	7	19	2	-	-	-	-	-	28
vegetables	7	21	0	-	-	-	-	-	28
home compound	0	26	2	-	-	-	-	-	28

Source: Field Survey, 1995

During the short rains, area under maize reduced in general but it varied between 0.25 and 2.5 acres. At harvest, only 42 percent of the 28 households were able to balance their food supply with demand. This proportion of households with adequate food increased to about 45 percent when supplies from both purchases and seeking assistance were taken into account.

The fact that households with the same amount of land at hand could pursue different cropping patterns suggests that land use is couched in how opportunities and constraints (life chances) are conceptualised. Whereas this is perceived at two levels (namely, that households could grow all or some of their food or, with returns accruing from other land uses, they can purchase food), most people put their land to various uses, for reasons other than the two above. For example, Bathseba switched to a different cropping pattern because of what she described as 'changes' in her life. In an attempt to continue benefitting from her family's investments, mainly coffee and tea, and after surrendering one third of the land following her husband's decision to take a second wife, Bathseba varied her maize acreage downwards and at one point this got to zero level, in an attempt to avenge her husband's decision. On the other hand, Yobensiah also put less land into maize cultivation but for different reasons. Like most other smallholders, Yobensiah enjoyed great satisfaction from the fact that she enlisted all available opportunities aimed at meeting both her food needs and cash incomes. With no other source of income or one that can be counted on 'for always', Yobensiah devised ways of taking care of the family's future needs such as paying of school fees at the same time as she catered for a re-current and more immediate concern, food cultivation. This is evident from the following account from her:

> 'in 1975, my husband planted coffee, a year after we acquired land, given to him by his father. This occupied one quarter of an acre. In 1993, we planted our first sugar-cane and in 1994, he planted tea. We first planted coffee to earn money but soon we realised that tea was a quicker income earner. However, we could not move away from coffee completely because this would have meant uprooting it. We had already invested money in the enterprise and besides, we are not even allowed to uproot these coffee trees. Coffee prices might pick up in future, and as it is we have not really started earning any income from tea. So far tea brings us about sixty shillings a month. But, between May and September (1996), we sold coffee worth two thousand shillings. I also raised some money from the sale of finger millet, bananas, sugar-cane and vegetables. I am however against specialisation because I may have the money but fail to get maize on the market. I have therefore continued to hire land to plant maize even when sometimes hiring and planting amount to much more than purchasing. But, buying maize is more difficult, people may look down upon me if they realise that I just depend on the market for food.'

Cropping patterns are evidently an outcome of everyday negotiations which are also shaped by events taking place in faraway places. For instance, circumstance surrounding the introduction of coffee growing in Kisii prompted every young adult male to take up coffee farming at the earliest opportunity, that is, when they gained access to a piece of land that they could call their own. Therefore, although food cultivation remains dominant, these two cropping patterns have continued to co-exist. The question is, however, in diversifying, do farmers actually plan or even accept the possibility that they may not, as a result of their cropping, meet all their food needs through cultivation? While rural households are described as engaged in a diversity of cropping as one way of spreading risk,[9] underlying this behaviour is a desire to maximise resources, more than the fear of 'putting all their eggs in one basket'. Households therefore grow crops for the market and still go ahead and cultivate food crops, while dreading the option of having to purchase food from incomes earned. In other words, while the cropping patterns undertaken by most households may contribute to a shortfall in their food harvest, this is not what the farmer intends. On the contrary, and in spite of putting available land under several uses simultaneously, the farmer desires to maximise on both ends, an expectation that then tends to guide the general attitude towards equating food security with self-sufficiency. And for this, both purchasing and seeking assistance have, in the eyes of many rural households, remained only coping mechanisms.

Agronomic practices: the ideology underlying choice

Modernisation of agriculture has inspired many 'experts' as being the key to improved production.[10] In addition to introducing new crops, specified farming methods are identified as the only way to attain higher yields. Farmers are therefore urged to adopt these packages in full and levels of success continue to be based on how close they get to implementing these recommendations unabridged. In Kisii, 'proper' maize husbandry is viewed by the Ministry of Agriculture as involving timely preparation of land for planting, use of clean and viable seeds, effective use of recommended inputs and careful handling of the crop at harvest (Chapter 1).

The cropping cycle

During the long rains of 1995, land preparation for the maize crop was concentrated in the months of January through February and almost all planting took place in February. Weeding was mainly undertaken in March and April, and close to everybody harvested in August. In addition, land preparation for the short rains crop was under way as early as June and this continued through to September but, the vast majority of people ploughed their fields in July through August. Most

farmers planted in August, although a few did so a bit earlier or later on in September. Weeding took place in September through October and harvest time began in December and lasted until February.

This cropping calendar demonstrates a divergency from what is technically recommended (cf Chapter 1). Most activities begin much earlier than recommended, notably land preparation, planting and weeding. Besides, farmers engage in much more than maize cultivation. They also plant finger millet and sorghum at about the same period, although on a smaller scale. In reality therefore, smallholders are engaged in a multiplicity of farm and non-farm activities, maize cultivation and food production in general being only one of them. And, whereas this cropping calendar was the case overall, some of the households that depended on cultivation only in 1995, began their land preparations earlier and they also completed their weeding earlier compared to all the 59 households that also turned to purchasing and seeking assistance for additional supplies. The latter did not undertake land preparation until January and some of them weeded late into the months of April and May.

Apparently, farmers enlist only those farm practices that they find practical and 'essential', largely because these can be accommodated within their lifeworlds. What then looks like deviation from the 'norm' is a conscious decision borne out of the fact that such packages and any other intervention has to be weighed against other costs and benefits that exist in the individual's life circumstances. How farm households in Kisii continue to respond to the introduction of some of the key technologies to maize growing as envisaged at policy level is therefore crucial in explaining food output levels.

I have argued that what goes on in a farm may be a technical procedure but it is socially constructed. This takes place at two levels. One, an external recommendation is taken up and adapted to people's everyday lives, which means that the initial technology acquires 'new' meaning or, the same ideology underlying this choice results in such a technology being 'rejected' in its totality. Most agronomic practices at the household level reflect the first scenario.

Relay cropping: cultivating maize in maize

Over 57 percent of the households had resorted to planting 'maize in maize', from time to time. Whereas this practice reportedly took place as early as 1950, most of the farmers only engaged in it for the first time in 1980, probably because this was also a drought year. The practice is becoming increasingly frequent and in 1995 alone, over one half of the households planted 'maize in maize'. Although the reason that farmers gave for planting 'maize in maize' was that they needed to 'keep up' with the seasons, the underlying concern was a need to maximise on available land.

Seasons only started overlapping when the Gusii adjusted their cropping in line with the bimodal rainfall, a practice that is reported to have first appeared to the

southern parts of the District. Prior to this, the Gusii planted only once a year. However, this over-lap was not a problem for as long as there was enough land (and labour) and if anything, bimodal cropping enabled the Gusii to continue being food self-sufficient even at a time when other crops were being introduced to 'compete' for the same resources (cf Chapter 4). However, the fact that almost all farmers now use the same piece of land over and over for their maize crop, and some activities have to be under way at a time when the other crop is still in the fields, has given way to relay cropping, planting 'maize in maize'. To effect this, farmers prune their maize plants slightly above the cob to create room for the next crop and the 'pruned' maize crop remains in the fields awaiting physiological maturity. Meanwhile, they plough in between these pruned maize plants and should the rains begin before harvest time (as would often be the case), the new maize seed is sowed in between the old crop.

According to technical guidelines, planting one maize crop within another presents several constraints. In addition to the fact that the land is no longer rested or even mulched, the apparent congestion resulting from a doubled crop population gives way to competition for soil nutrients while opening up of the soil to sow new seed exposes the old crop to possible moisture loss. In addition, the labour force is overburdened at a time when (their) food supply is at its lowest ebb. Nevertheless, there was no noticeable difference in yield between households that engaged in relay cropping and those that did not. A comparison between the yields of households that had never engaged in relay cropping with those that 'planted maize in maize' in 1995 shows that in each case, only about 5 percent of these households realised a yield equivalent to 18 bags per acre. The majority (~68%) harvested between one and five bags, and another one fifth harvested between 6 and 10 bags. The remaining households (7%) harvested between 11 and 17 bags of maize.

While diminishing land size and a shift in cropping activities featured as reasons why farmers were increasingly growing 'maize in maize', it was also apparent that some households that nevertheless ended up re-using the same piece of land for their second maize crop were not caught in a situation that would force them to plant 'maize in maize'. This suggests that the cropping calendar is influenced by the organisational skill of the farmer and their individual realities than a shift in rainfall patterns. For example, both Sarah and Yobensiah planted maize twice a year but in 1995, only Yobensiah engaged in planting 'maize in maize'. Yobensiah explained that she did not have enough money to hire labour so she did not prepare land for the long rains crop until February, the same month that she planted. Her harvest from the long rains crop did not fall through until late August and by this time she needed to have prepared land for the second cropping. The rains arrived and she had to plant in August. Similarly, Kerubo (Chapter 7) planted maize in maize out of a practical delay. Although she started preparing her land for the long rains crop in January, she could not plant in time because she was also engaged elsewhere, providing casual labour for a wage. Working for pay was necessary to enable her

raise money for farm inputs, among other needs. In spite of growing 'maize in maize', both Kerubo and Yobensiah realised better yields per unit area compared to Sarah who had never faced such delays as would occasion planting 'maize in maize'. Sarah however continued to enjoy food self-sufficiency levels which neither Yobensiah nor Kerubo could, because their land area was much smaller. But, while both Yobensiah and Kerubo realised a similar yield (of 6 and 7 bags per acre, respectively), they differed in some of their farm practices. Unlike Yobensiah who used both line and staggered planting, Kerubo always planted her maize in lines.

Planting method: lines or staggered

Much as line planting and timely weeding form some of the major recommendations of the improved maize seed package, only a few (27%) farmers had taken up line planting in totality. The greater majority (44%) oscillated between line and staggered planting. And, some (29%) had never changed from the staggered method. Line planting was favoured because households associated it with higher yields or just because it was recommended by extension staff, or it made weeding and harvesting easy. Some farmers also felt that the lines allowed for more crop or they prevented maize from falling in heavy wind. On the other hand, other farmers stated that the staggered method was the only procedure known to them, or they continued to use it because it was easy and faster to apply, it required less labour to undertake or everybody else was using it.

Whereas both staggered and line planting are meant to be two extremes, with line planting as the 'superior' of the two methods, farmers conceptualised these differences variously. In both cases, they were more concerned about the labour demands of any one method, especially the ease and speed with which any of the two methods could be applied. One farmer just dismissed line planting with the simple reason that she did not own a rope to guide her in making the necessary rows. Using a rope demands that planting points be marked out first before sowing can begin and this has to take place from one end of the field to the other. This procedure becomes slow for those who may not have sufficient farm labour and it can be quite cumbersome when little meaning is attached to it. On the other hand, staggered planting was rejected by some farmers as 'old fashioned' and unsuitable for the improved seed. This group of farmers therefore took up line planting because it was modern and 'necessary' in the application of HYV seed. They even argued that line planting yields more grain because it takes up more plants. This is however not exactly the case if one were to follow spacing specifications as outlined in Chapter 1. But, for those who may end up planting 'maize in maize', line planting provides better possibilities.

For most farmers, both staggered and line planting were taken up as and when it was appropriate. The two methods were therefore applied almost on an alternating

basis and sometimes during the same season. This was made possible by applying each method on different maize fields during the same season, or in each of the two seasons of the year.

Yobensiah was one such farmer. Although she started growing maize on her own account in 1975, she did not adopt line planting until 1985, and in 1994 she dropped it in favour of staggered planting. She stated that line planting was no longer feasible because that year 'her maize field' had been reduced even more after her husband put some of the land under tea. Furthermore, she had less labour. All her children except one were now away in boarding (secondary) school. Yobensiah's argument is based on a practical concern. Line planting is more favourable with children because when they are involved in sowing, it is faster and there is less chance of them wasting space compared to staggered planting which depends a lot on making appropriate estimations in all four directions. But, much as line planting is associated with HYV seed and fertilisers, Yobensiah took up the HYV seed for the first time only in 1992, although she had used both line planting and fertilisers since 1985. Yobensiah explained that she took up line planting and fertiliser application following knowledge that she received from her first contact with extension workers. Much as she was advised on the full details of the maize package, Yobensiah delayed taking up the HYV seed because she did not find the technology essential at the time. But when her output started dropping and at a time when she needed more, Yobensiah turned to the HYV seed.

High yielding variety seed and fertilisers

Over 90 percent of the households had used fertilisers at one time or another and the first person applied them in 1945, almost ten years earlier than the appearance of hybrid seed.[11] But, this movement towards the application of fertilisers did not take just one direction. In 1995, some of the households that were already dependent on fertilisers withdrew. Farmers generally argued that the application of fertilisers weakens soils and besides, once soils get used to such boosts, the practice has to continue otherwise yields will drop even more drastically. For fear of inconsistency in use resulting from non-availability or economic constraints, most farmers found it only logical to avoid/discontinue the application of fertilisers all together. But there was an exception. Farmers who leased in land and could afford fertilisers, continued to apply them to their maize crop. They explained that since the land did not belong to them, they did not see much risk if they were not able to afford fertilisers the next time around.

In spite of these misgivings, all except six households had at some time used fertilisers in maize cultivation, and in 1995, over 90 percent of the households applied fertilisers to their maize crop. In most cases, farmers based the decision to apply fertilisers on much more than the type of seed that was in use. Some farmers

applied fertilisers on local seed while others used the HYV seed without fertiliser.[12] This decision was largely economic but farmers also argued that going halfway was better than not trying at all. For example, only 58 percent of the 218 households that applied fertilisers in 1995 also used the HYV maize seed that year. The rest (37%) discontinued use of this seed and for some of them, this was as long ago as 1976 or, as was the case for ten of them, they had never used the HYV seed, in spite of having taken up fertilisers. On the other hand, 77 percent of the households that applied fertilisers in 1995 also used the local maize seed during the same period. The rest of the households that applied fertilisers had never used local seed (9%) or, they had discontinued its use (15%), some of them as early as 1955 (Table 6.4).

Table 6.4 Type of seed used by households that applied fertilisers to their maize crop in 1995

period when each seed type was used	used HYV maize seed		used local maize seed	
	%	n=	%	n=
in 1995	58.3	127	76.6	167
in previous years	37.1	81	14.7	32
never used seed type	4.6	10	8.7	19
column totals	100.0	218	100.0	218

Source: Field Survey, 1995

There is an evident overlap regarding the choice of seed relative to the application of fertilisers. Some of the households that applied fertilisers to their maize crop in 1995 used both the local and the HYV seed. But others that also applied fertilisers did not use the HYV seed and vice versa. For instance, whereas 127 households used fertilisers and HYV seed in 1995, 95 of them also used local seed. Although the remaining 32 households did not use local seed in 1995, 17 of them had used the seed in previous years. Only 15 of the households (12%) that used both fertilisers and HYV seed in 1995 had never combined use of fertilisers with local seed. Similarly, while the 81 households that did not use fertilisers in 1995 used the HYV seed, 62 of them combined this with local seed during the same year, and another 15 households had used local seed in previous years. Only 4 of the households (5%) that applied fertilisers in 1995 had never used the local maize seed. And ten of the households that applied fertilisers in 1995 had never used HYV seed (Table 6.5).

Table 6.5 Seed combinations for the 218 households that applied fertilisers in 1995

	when households used the HYV maize seed last			
when households used the *local* maize seed last	in 1995	in previous years	never	row total (n=)
in 1995	95	62	10	167
in previous years	17	15	-	32
never	15	4	-	19
column total (n=)	127	81	10	218

Source: Field Survey, 1995

Whereas the HYV seed was taken up as early as the 1950s, this has existed side by side with local varieties. In 1995, over 75 percent of the farmers used the local variety of the maize seed compared to only 58 percent who used the HYV seed. This does not, however, mean that the HYV seed is less common. On the contrary, out of the 240 farmers that were interviewed, 227 of them had used the HYV seed at least once before and this is higher, although only slightly, compared to the 219 households that had used the local variety of seed over time. Nevertheless, the use of HYV seed fluctuated much more than that of local seed, and this seems to have intensified in the 1990s, observations that point towards both economic and physical access more than a deliberate attempt to move away from this technology. While most people purchased the maize seed that they sowed, local seed was, by far, cheaper than the hybrid.[13]

Unlike fertilisers where farmers can and are able to negotiate the amounts to be applied, almost on the basis of what they can pay for, this cannot apply in the case of seed, largely because, as the farmers rightly argued, this would be a deliberate reduction in the crop's population. In addition to possible economic hardships, the utilisation of the HYV seed is constrained by recent changes in seed production and distribution. These changes have rendered available supplies suspect as there lacks quality control, among other requirements (cf Onyango 1998).

But the choice and combination of technologies is not always out of an individual's own decision and neither is a lack of awareness of its existence the main constraint. For example, Josephine was engaged in a kind of 'low external inputs' cultivation. She had never used HYV seed, she never applied line planting and she never used paid labour. In spite of this, Josephine sometimes used fertilisers. This decision, beyond her realm of farm organisation, came about because the fertilisers were given to her as a 'gift', from a benevolent cousin, the same cousin who was supporting her by paying the school fees of her brothers and sisters (Chapter 5). This cousin often brought fertilisers to Josephine when he came home from Nairobi to

visit, and bring farm inputs to his mother (also Josephine's neighbour). For Josephine, this was just an 'added advantage' to her farming and whenever the cousin did not provide this, she never purchased fertilisers, although there is a likelihood that she could afford them. The possibility that fertiliser application did not have much impact on Josephine's farming was not self evident because, her 'extensive' cultivation concealed her low output per unit area. Nevertheless, Josephine's yield (of 5.85 bags per acre) was better than for Chris who, in spite of using both HYV seed and fertilisers, realised an average of 3.5 bags per acre and this fluctuated between 2.67 and 4 bags. While Chris and Josephine represent two extremes in terms of the type of maize seed that each used, Sarah, Sabina and Yobensiah existed in 'both worlds'. They used both local and HYV seed, sometimes simultaneously.

In arguing for the centrality of the meanings that people attach to their farm practices, I have pointed out that this depends on how they perceive the reality around them, a frame of reference that also draws on their experiences. For example, whereas the Nandi in the Rift Valley part of Kenya are observed to have adopted the use of fertilisers and the HYV seed as a package (Hebinck 1990), this has been necessarily different in Kisii District. Unlike the Nandi, and despite the fact that these two communities are exposed to similar macro policies, the Gusii experienced this adoption differently. This is largely because the Gusii were already cultivating maize at the time that these new technologies were being introduced to them. Hence, as it were, the maize package that was given to the Gusii entered an existing lifeworld and for this, the use of local seed, like several other practices, has continued to co-exist with the HYV varieties.

On the other hand, because fertilisers were perceived by the Gusii as the actual magic behind the miracle seed, they easily replaced existing mechanisms for maintaining soil fertility. This was enhanced by the rapid disappearance of large scale livestock rearing from the Gusii domestic economy, together with changes in land use that led to the non-applicability of fallowing and mulching (cf Chapter 4). However, these 'magical powers' in chemical fertilisers are now being questioned, both by farmers and by environmentalists.

The future of cultivation as a source of food

Among the things that are assumed in the literature when farmers who have been able to attain technically recommended yields are encountered is that they are a 'unique' group and therefore 'modern'. Those others that do not attain recommended outputs must then be engaged in practices that are 'off the mark'.[14] However, discussions throughout this chapter suggest that the application of technologies that are considered modern and therefore assumed to be efficient does not, on its own, explain variations in yield. In actual practice, unit output is a 'product' of the ways in

which crop husbandry practices are (socially) moulded, hence, the diversity, incongruity and co-existence in farm practices. For example, although fertilisers are widely applied and the HYV seed is used to a considerable degree, farmers have not taken up these technologies unabridged. Indeed, much as this was more at a philosophical level than in practice, farmers were already questioning the overall gains in applying fertilisers. In addition, much reference was made to the fact that some harvests turned out poor because the farmers used the wrong seed variety or, they did not apply top dressing and other requirements that must accompany the use of HYV seed (cf Case Studies, Chapter 5). What this means therefore is that, in addition to the struggle to accommodate these technologies, there are structural constraints that hinder the general movement towards a profitable application. The question therefore is, what challenges face those who might choose to continue growing some or all their food?

In Chapter 3, we saw that in addition to providing enough food, the agricultural sector in Kenya is viewed as a source of employment. And in pursuit of this, labour intensive technologies are preferred. However, low remuneration has continued to render farmwork an unattractive occupation. Hence, one of the constant challenges facing most rural households is too few workers (and maybe too many consumers). This is complicated by the fact that the kind of activities that farmers engage in cannot support hired labour. And in an attempt to avoid spending money that is often not there anyway, these households suffer inefficiencies. For example, one of the reasons why seasons overlap is because of a lack of sufficient labour which then brings about delays, followed by low yields.

Rough estimates show that unit output per acre of maize rose from less than five bags in the 1950s to the current 18 bags. This has been attributed to variations in crop husbandry and in particular, timeliness in land preparation, weeding and harvesting, and the ability to stick to the correct proportions while using recommended inputs, especially the amount of fertilisers to be applied to HYV seed (cf Chapter 3). However, strides in technological innovation have been characterised by several contradictions, the major one being that some of the households that seem to practice maize cultivation as recommended continue to realise low yields.[15]

Figure 6.4 portrays the food security levels for the 180 households that depended on cultivation only in 1995 relative to some of the major maize husbandry practices that these households engaged in that year. It is indicated that whereas 74 percent of households that used HYV seed obtained adequate food supplies, this was also the case for about 65 percent among those that did not use HYV seed during the same period (cf 1 & 2). Similarly, while 71 percent of households that obtained adequate supplies through harvest had applied fertilisers, also 60 percent of households that did not apply fertilisers to their maize crop in 1995 obtained a sufficient harvest (cf 3 & 4). These differences were, however, slightly more between households who used local seed and those that did not (cf 5 & 6), or those who planted in lines as compared to those who used the staggered method (cf 7 & 8; 9 & 10).

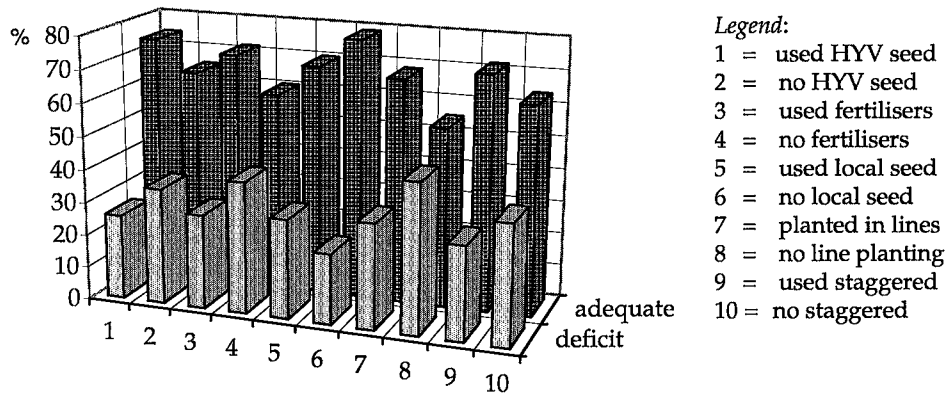


Figure 6.4 Relationship between various crop husbandry practices and the food position of households that depended only on cultivation for their food needs in 1995
Source: Field Survey, 1995

Therefore, whereas one would want to assume that the future of cultivation as a source of food lies with higher yielding husbandry practices, Figure 6.4 suggests that there is a need to look beyond the mere existence of these technologies, by understanding how they are actually applied. Indeed, the various case studies have indicated that, in the process of attempting to reconcile practical realities with technological specifications, the way some of these technologies are applied defeats the whole purpose of bringing them on board. Among the most immediate lessons, however, is the fact that pre-occupation with meeting subsistence needs renders those concerned incapable of investing both in basic cultivation and in their larger livelihoods.

Within the policy framework, these constraints are perceived as relating to a lack of knowledge or the non-availability of supplies arising from poor distribution (cf Chapter 3). In spite of this, most of the 240 households interviewed (72%) reported having had contact with extension workers, and many of these workers are located within reach, estimated at an average of three kilometres. Instead, the patterns emerging from the way these technologies are taken up suggest that, despite knowledge of what it should be, most farmers are forced to devise a strategy that will accommodate their reality, largely what they can afford. But, in this attempt to take up these technologies 'on their own terms', farmers end up not following specifications. Consequently, the application of most of these technologies ends up not having the desired impact.

Therefore, in general, the amount of land available to households has remained central to how cultivation functions as a source of food. For instance, although an overwhelming majority of farmers were observed to be currently operating 'under

capacity', this was overshadowed by the fact that some of these households continued to be food self-sufficient, due to the amount of land that they are able to put under cultivation. On the other hand, other households that were comparatively more efficient but with smaller land holdings did not achieve desired harvests.

Gaining access to land depends on parental endowment and, subsequently, on the number of male heirs. The land inherited could be reduced further if such households are polygamous. These factors do not, however, 'seal' the fate of male siblings. Some, like Stephen, Sarah's husband, are able to augment their holdings with purchases, while others are never able to do so. Indeed, projections into the future in terms of what the present generation will be able to hand-over to their offspring suggest that more than one third of these children will have less than one acre of land to depend on, and thereafter to pass to their sons (Table 6.6).[16]

Table 6.6 Land ownership patterns across three generations

amount of land, acres	what the farmer's parents owned %	what the farmer owns (inherited and purchased) %	what the farmer is likely to pass on to each son %
less than 1	0.8	4.2	36.8
1 - 2	9.6	33.8	46.2
3 - 4	17.5	34.6	10.8
5 - 10	48.3	23.2	4.9
11 or more	23.8	4.2	1.3
column total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 1995

We cannot postulate, however, what the exact situation is likely to be in the future. For example, although both Yobensiah and Bathseba's husbands were uniformly endowed with two acres of land at the point of inheriting from parents, and each of the men had an off-farm income, they augmented their land parcels differently. Yobensiah leased in one acre while Bathseba relied on a similar quantity but one that was acquired through purchasing and therefore available for posterity, although of course this was no longer the case following her husband's decision to take a second wife. Secondly, some of the households that had inherited among the smallest land parcels were able to augment them enormously (Sabina) whereas for others (Kerubo), this meagre endowment marked the beginning of a delicate and downward trend in their search for adequate food. Thus, until such a time that yields can be optimised and in the absence of an off-farm income, the amount of land

available to a household will remain the most decisive element among those with an inclination towards cultivating some or all their food.

Early in this chapter, I stated that both purchasing and seeking assistance are sources of food that households turn to after encountering shortfalls in harvests, and this is not pre-arranged. We have seen that, in general, households aim to optimize food output but this is interpreted variedly. While some target higher yields, others aim at expanding the cropped area. Consequently, some of the households that allocate relatively less land to food crops obtain sufficient harvests while others have to use much more land to realise this target. Furthermore, whereas these farm practices are not exclusively unique to any one food security strategy, the amount of food harvested remains central in determining who turns elsewhere. Even then, households that turned to supplementary sources for additional food included those that had realised surpluses at harvest time.

Notes

1. This ratio of harvested food to consumption excludes what may have been sold or given out as assistance. These issues are expounded upon in Chapter 7.

2. Bennett (1980) has argued that farm enterprise management is more than a set of financial or economic decisions because, it includes a form of social behaviour that takes place in the context of family and community relations. cf van der Ploeg 1990.

3. Hebinck & van der Ploeg (1997, p.209) portray the social relations of production as the diversity in linkages between various domains, such as, the family, community and social networks on the one hand and, technology, markets and institutions on the other.

4. The District has one of the highest birth rates in the country (Republic of Kenya, Population Census 1989). Nevertheless, population growth alone does not explain changes in the District's food position (Omosa 1998; Boserup 1965; 1981; Lappe & Collins 1977). In the current study, the relationship between consumption levels and the food security position is discussed in Chapter 8.

5. Households and individuals gain access to land through inheritance, purchasing and/or leasing in. Available land here refers to what had been obtained and was actually at the household's disposal in 1995. As we will see from time to time, access to this available land could also vary for individuals within a household.

6. Whereas the amount of land available to households was easy to ascertain, what went to each crop and, in particular, for crops that were not in season at the time, could not be confirmed. This acreage is therefore based on estimates. This is however still useful because variations in the importance attached to certain crops is still apparent. The case study accounts approximate these actual sizes better because these households were visited several times during the cropping calendar.

7. Sarah's total maize area excludes the 0.25 acres that she leased in 1995. This is because she put all this under finger millet and sorghum. The contribution of both sorghum and finger millet as alternative foods is discussed in Chapter 7.

8. Of course farmers have learnt how to go around this. By neglecting the crop, the coffee trees are left to die a natural death.

9. See for example: Delgado 1995; Braun & Kennedy 1994; Braun 1995.

10. See for example: Alarmgir & Arora 1991; FAO 1990b; Clayton 1964; Bachuman & Paulino 1979; Cowen 1983; Scriplung & Heady 1976; cf Castillo 1976; Bernstein 1977; Jones 1984; Hay 1976; Swaminathan 1983; Pingali & Rosegrant 1995; Braun 1995; World Bank 1986; Devereux 1993a.

11. High yielding maize seed first appeared on the Kenyan market around 1954. Since then, there have been several on-station trials resulting in specific recommendations. In the Upper Midlands of Kisii District, the *H600* series seed is recommended (Department of Farm Management, Kisii). During the short rains crop, farmers prefer the *H500* series.

12. Local seed is here used to refer to maize seed other than what is certified. This local seed could be a product of several decades of regeneration of what was once the indigenous seed of the Gusii (*emekebaru*), or it could be what was introduced during colonial rule (*rigegu*) and inter-ethnic contacts resulting from migrations (*moragoli*), or a composite of all these processes. The evolution of the maize seed among the Gusii is covered in detail in Chapter 4.

13. Technical estimates recommend that farmers use 25 kilogrammes of the HYV seed on one hectare of land, which is equivalent to about 10 kilogrammes of HYV seed per acre of land. In 1997, a farmer cultivating one acre of maize would therefore have required to spend Kshs. 735 on maize seed, up from Kshs. 625 in the 1995/96 season. A similar quantity of local seed would have cost less than 20 percent of these amounts.

14. See for example Seavoy 1989; Oluwasanmi 1976; Schultz 1964; Clayton 1964.

15. For example, only 12 of the 240 households interviewed attained a maize yield equivalent to the recommended output of 18 bags per acre. These yields exclude what households may have obtained through hastening maturity by placing wet maize in the sun to dry (*ogotobora*) or by harvesting green maize. The latter is a common practice and elsewhere in the country, green maize is sold on a large scale. However, although about 95 percent of the households in Kisii reported having removed green maize, this was only limited to home consumption. This maize is boiled or roasted and served as a snack.

16. This is a hypothetical estimation based on the ratio of what is currently owned (inherited and purchased) to the number of male children. Although the Kenyan Constitution entitles each child to a share of family land (and other properties), cultural practices override. Among the Gusii, only male children can inherit land from their parents, and each one is entitled to an equal share. For details see Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 7

LIVING WITH FOOD SHORTAGES

Chapter 5 focused on the strategies that households employ to secure food. Most households had used more than one approach. The choice was seen as stemming from how life chances are conceptualised, a process that shifts and swings. In spite of this, cultivating staple food remained a dominant strategy. Chapter 6 took this a step further by analysing cultivation as a primary source, yet one that continues to elude many. Chapter 7 now centres on how shortfalls arising from cultivation, planned or accidental, are accommodated in people's everyday lives. In this chapter, I delve deeper into people's livelihoods, a household's abilities and capabilities to access, maintain and improve food supplies. I focus on the potentiality in the possibilities open to rural households once they face food shortages emanating from a shortfall in their harvests. These possibilities include the social and economic networks that households mobilise so as to bridge this gap, a process that transforms only some households into food secure units. I also explore the (social) transformations taking place in the specific relationships in which these possibilities are embedded, and how food deficits continue to be managed, anyhow.

Beyond seasonality

Food shortages arising from a shortfall in harvest are mainly concentrated in the pre-harvest periods, January-February and May-June-July. Described as the 'hungry season', this period is assumed to be temporary and a new harvest is expected to bring any food shortages arising from this to an end (Hoorweg *et al.* 1995). But, when food shortages come to permanently characterise individual units and even expand their boundaries beyond the 'lean' period, they are no longer seasonal. Hence, what is assumed to be a seasonal or regular food shortage is a form of permanent hunger but one that is largely camouflaged. I therefore argue for the need to look beyond seasonality in the search for answers, on two grounds. One, that the search for food is an activity that takes place in a 'life' situation. In other words, food shortages could and do arise in spite of rainfall patterns. Secondly, food insecurity should not necessarily arise from a gap between harvests because, whenever there is such an outcome, the expectation is that households will turn to other existing sources for additional supplies. However, while there seems to be an overall consensus about the need to balance supply with demand, it is not clear when this balance can be said to have been attained.

In Chapter 4 we saw that people experience food shortages differently. Even in cases where there were no reported casualties, some food shortages were considered notorious because they disrupted livelihoods. Indeed, underlying some of the divergencies in contemporary debates on food security is the issue of what constitutes adequate food. This largely emanates from discrepancies regarding what comprises a 'just' foodbasket. That is, what is enough and who decides on this? What constitutes hunger or even abundance rests on assumptions, several of which draw on how food security is conceptualised (cf Chapters 2 & 3). Below, I elaborate upon a discussion that was introduced in Chapter 6 where I briefly outlined how estimates on household food needs were arrived at.

What constitutes a foodbasket

What constitutes food security is the central theme in this thesis. In general, I have argued that food security is a household's ability to command an adequate source of required food through any one or a combination of existing sources. However, for purposes of computation, adequate food can be said to refer to the ratio of actual supplies to what individual households *require* in order to meet their food needs. These requirements constitute a 'foodbasket'. Although this foodbasket is often used in reference to a balanced diet, the current discussion will limit itself to staple food.

There are several interpretations regarding what constitutes an adequate amount of (staple) food. These range from an assessment of the amount of calories that a specified food provides vis-à-vis expected intake, to a more broader approach that focuses on the quantities of food required based on actual demand. The latter takes into account the diversity in people's consumption patterns and, in particular, those relating to variations in actual intake and who can partake in meals. It accommodates the fact that people do make choices and these are often not pre-arranged.

The apparent variations on how to measure adequate food derive largely from the fact that food is both a physiological and a social instrument. The latter refers to what takes place in everyday practice and, in my understanding, it approximates reality. Moreover, assessing food needs in terms of caloric requirements is based on several assumptions, many of which result in discrepancies between what is assumed to be adequate and what it actually takes to consider a specified amount of food enough. As evidenced by the various case studies in this thesis, food security entails several things, some of which remain intangible, further necessitating the need to go along with how people view their consumption needs, as opposed to how they are expected to conduct them.[1]

In this study, I preferred to assess food needs from the point of view of what households actually consumed. This relates closely to people's everyday practices, a

crucial component in seeking to understand how food security comes about and for whom in particular. In order to determine households that were able to balance food demand with supply, I looked at how long food supplies from harvests, purchases and assistance received lasted, over a one year period, relative to projections that were derived from what households consumed per week during periods of regular supply.

Table 7.1 illustrates the ratio of food supply to demand for selected households. There are two types of food supply-demand ratios. In one, demand is derived from actual food intake while in the other this is based on the amount of calories contained in available food. In general, the caloric approach suggests that households were less food secure than is evidenced from actual demand. These differences are a result of the theoretical assumptions underlying each of these methods. In the remaining part of this section, I look at the ratio of food supply to demand more generally.

Table 7.1 The ratio of food supply to demand for selected households

characteristics	H1	H2	H3	H4	H5	H6	H7	H8
household size	6	9	7	7	9	5	11	9
age of youngest resident, years	1	7	11	8	7	2	12	8
days taken to consume a *debe* of maize	7	5	9	7	3	14	7	3
maize supplies from harvests, purchases and assistance, bags	38	16	21	9	15	6	13	4.5
proportion of food supply to demand (actual)[2]	437%	132%	311%	15%	10%	138%	150%	22%
proportion of food supply to demand (caloric)[3]	312%	88%	148%	63%	11%	59%	58%	25%

Source: Field Survey, 1995

In 1995, close to 60 percent of the 240 households interviewed realised a harvest equivalent to their food needs, much of it because of combining supplies from the two rainfall seasons, in the absence of which, most households would have experienced higher shortfalls. However, despite the assumption that households grow only what they can with the intention of meeting shortfalls on the market, among other sources, this margin reduced only slightly when both purchases and assistance received were

taken into account. Consequently, only 63 percent of the households were able to balance their food demand with supplies from harvests, purchases and seeking assistance. The remainder of the households (37%) were faced with a deficit, and for some of them this set in within six months.

Figure 7.1 illustrates the length of time (weeks) that food supplies from each of the major sources lasted. In the discussion that follows, I briefly cover the contribution of each of these sources. I mainly look at how long food supplies lasted over a 52 weeks period and for what percentage of households. In general, households whose food supplies lasted for less than 52 weeks (one year) are considered to experience a shortage. The percentages used are incremental.

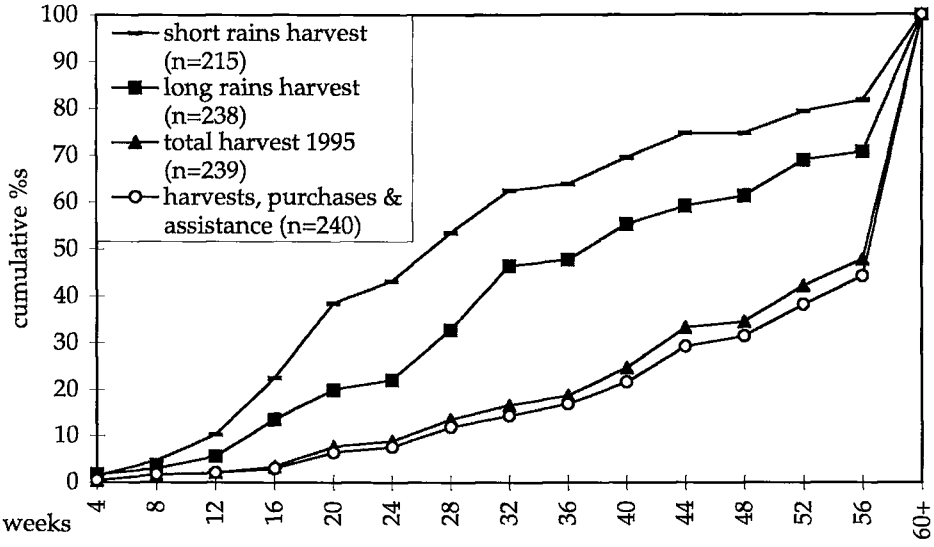


Figure 7.1 Length of time that food supplies (bags) from each of the listed sources lasted, weeks
Source: Field Survey, 1995

Harvest from the short rains constituted about 40 percent of the food supplies (Chapter 6). If they were to be spread over a one year period, these supplies would be sufficient to cover the food needs of about 25 percent of the households (n=215). As is evident from Figure 7.1, the majority of households (75%) fell below the 52 weeks mark. Harvests from the long rains crop were slightly better. Over a similar period of 52 weeks, these supplies were sufficient to cover the food needs of about 40 percent of the households (n=238). However, cumulatively, as is indicated in Figure 7.1, the long rains harvest was not enough for a considerable proportion (60%) of the households.

However, once food harvests from the two rainy seasons are combined as is the general practice, these stocks were adequate to cover the food needs of more than one half of the households (n=239). Nevertheless, some of the households that did not balance their food supply with demand through cultivation had shortfalls amounting to six months worth of food needs.

Central to discussions in this chapter is the observation that, despite turning to buying and seeking assistance, food supplies from these sources made only a slight difference towards enabling households meet their food needs. As illustrated in Figure 7.1, only about two thirds of the households (n=240) were able to balance their food supply with demand, on the basis of what they received from cultivation, purchases and assistance. In terms of time period, some of the households had deficits amounting to several weeks in a year.

Therefore, the fact that running out of stocks marked the beginning of a never ending search for adequate food calls for questions, among them, why these households could not turn elsewhere, and when they did, why this did not enable most of them to meet their food needs. Although recourse to markets (*ogotonda*) and seeking assistance (*ogosuma*) are both perceived as indicators of food insecurity among the Gusii (Chapter 4), in this study, these two practices are recognised as potential strategies. As such, I focus on the ability of both markets and social safety nets to serve as sources of food among households in Kitutu Chache. I mainly concentrate on how households manage their shortfalls and the social and economic alliances that they enter into and how these decisions, in turn, structure efforts aimed at obtaining adequate food. As will become clear from discussions in this chapter, looking beyond cultivation as a source of food is tantamount to living with food shortages.

Coping with food shortages: how Kerubo blends her opportunities

Kerubo's account gives a general overview of what households engage in, with the aim of managing their food shortages and related aspects of life. This account also brings out the challenges that existing coping strategies must continue to face. Therefore, who is forced to 'live with shortages', how they cope, and what possibilities they face in an attempt to accommodate these food shortages will be the central focus. In other words, how do households reckon with shortfalls arising from their harvests?

Kerubo is 48 years old and a mother of seven children, aged between eight and 33 years. She lives on her matrimonial land measuring about three quarters of an acre. On this land she grows only food crops, namely, maize, finger millet, sorghum and a few bananas. She also has some napier grass along the borderline. She owns one cow, a local breed, two goats and five chickens. Her husband, like his two brothers, lived away from home until his retirement in January 1997. He worked as a casual labourer at the

Kericho Tea Estates, where he lived with some of their children. Prior to 1981, Kerubo made long visits to these Tea Estates, about one hundred and thirty kilometres away. While there, she assisted her husband in his tea picking duties. However, in 1981, Kerubo stopped making visits to her husband's place of work for reasons she considered 'personal'. Upon return to their rural home on a permanent basis, Kerubo leased in more land, one quarter of an acre so as to boost her food production. She raised this money by selling a goat and several chickens. Kerubo also earns a wage. She works four days a week from 7 a.m. to 12.00 noon, as a casual labourer at a neighbour's farm. She is paid at a rate of twenty shillings per day worked. Whenever Kerubo is engaged in land preparation as opposed to tea picking, she earns five shillings more per day.

In spite of her limited income, Kerubo tries to use up to date technology on her farm. She first used hybrid maize seed in 1972 and only discontinued this in 1993 when she could no longer cope with the high prices. But alongside hybrid seed, she has also used local maize seed since 1964 and fertilisers since 1974. But, Kerubo's harvest is generally low. In 1995, she harvested only three bags of maize of which she sold in total about half a bag, in small quantities whenever she required money to attend to some immediate needs. Kerubo's food needs are supplemented by purchases, seeking assistance and harvesting maize before it reaches its physiological maturity, *ogotobora*. She first engaged in *ogotobora* in 1970, only a few years after she started running her own independent household in 1964, two years into her marriage.

Kerubo explained that her 1995 maize harvest was particularly poor because:

'that year I lacked many things, my children were constantly ill. In desperation, I was forced to purchase fertilisers from an individual instead of a shop, not knowing that this fertiliser was specifically meant for tea. The fertiliser destroyed all my maize. But last year [1996] was good. I harvested two and a half bags of maize from the main crop and another two and a half from the second planting. I supplemented only very slightly with purchases. But, because every year I engage in *ogotobora*, my harvest is always low. I feel bad because then it looks like I work for nothing, soon after harvest my granary is empty again.'

Nineteen ninety three was, according to Kerubo, the most vivid of her troubled years. During this year, the hunger period stretched for over four months. A tin of maize, *omotoriro* sold at forty five shillings, up from an average of fifteen shillings. She could afford no more than two tins at a time. She sold all her goats and hens to raise money for maize. Things were even more complicated for her because it was impossible at this time to get *egeiseri*.[4] Many people did not have enough food and each person that had some feared that those seeking assistance might not be able to return the favour in time.

Kerubo has purchased maize since 1974. She explains her recourse to markets as follows:

> 'I turned to the market because my land is tiny. But, 1981 was the year that I depended on purchases most. [She had just returned from Kericho]. I sought assistance from my sister who is married just across the ridge. Since then, I have also sought assistance from my daughter, she is married some distance from here [about 32 kilometres]. But, these two have never come to seek assistance from me because they have enough food and they are also aware that I am not self-reliant. Some years I did not engage in *ogosuma* [seeking assistance], I was away in Kericho. Even now, I do not seek assistance every time, sometimes I take up contracts as a casual labourer and this earns me money with which I purchase food. On other occasions, I seek *egeiseri* [borrow] from Mary, she is a wife to my husband's step-brother and a member of my work group. I have also gone to Kwamboka, my friend. But in 1993, they both declined to give me *egeiseri*, I looked for contracts and purchased maize. Some days, I sent the children to bed hungry.'

But, the most helpful person, according to Kerubo is one of her brothers, who is a manager with a local bank in Western Kenya, about 185 kilometres away. According to Kerubo, this brother feels indebted to her because her bridewealth was used to pay for his education. He has therefore continued to assist her, and whenever he pays her a visit she too gives him a bunch of bananas from her *shamba* to take to his family. He is married with six children.[5]

During my visits to Kerubo in 1995 and 1996, she complained that her husband had abandoned her and the children. She said that he never sent her money, although she stated that he sometimes visited them from Kericho. He had, however, paid the school fees of their son, who had since completed secondary school and now works for a security firm in Nairobi where he lives with his wife. Kerubo lamented that this son did not send her money either. Her third child dropped out of school after getting pregnant and she is now living with her. But Kerubo has not, according to her own judgment, been reduced to a destitute. She stated that she is able to feed her children and she cannot therefore be counted among those 'nosy women who specialise in moving from home to home in search of food'. Asked why the saying did not refer to men too, Kerubo answered that she did not understand it either because as she claimed, men are worse. In her opinion, they did not work hard but just loitered and roamed around the village in search of food.[6] The assertion by Kerubo that most men were not productive raises the question of who actually contributes to securing food needs at the rural household level. Kerubo's argument is much in line with most discussions that portray women as the producers of food. While this may be true, it is also evident that the search for food is jointly undertaken, but the amount of burden borne by either men or women, during this endeavour, differs considerably.[7]

Kerubo perceived her husband as *omonyamwaka*[8] because he lived away from home, he rarely sent her money and his earnings did not therefore contribute much to their well-being. But I developed a different opinion when I met the man for the first time, in August 1997. He had retired early in the year and returned home. With his retirement benefits they were busy putting up a *mabati* (corrugated iron sheets) roofed house. On this particular day, it was apparent that Kerubo was in-charge of the project. The people who were constructing the house consulted her. And despite the fact that the husband was right there with her, it was she who gave them further instructions. Kerubo explained that they had put some of her husband's pension into the house that was being constructed and her husband had used the rest of the money to purchase one goat and a sheep. She then remarked that her husband now engaged in casual labour, although only occasionally, so as to continue earning some money for his 'soap', a local reference to any source of simple and meagre livelihood.

Making a living

Kerubo 'typifies' a rural household struggling to hold itself together. She is raising a family on less than adequate land which she has tried to augment by further depleting her other securities, goats and poultry. Yet, it seems very important to her that she grows her own food, in spite of the fact that her 1996 harvest (of five bags) could only last her for a maximum of 13 weeks that year. This was however an improvement on 1995 when she harvested a total of 3 bags. In addition to inadequate harvests, Kerubo's food security is further reduced by the need for sporadic sales. These sales are necessary for her to purchase other necessities.

Nevertheless, Kerubo has negotiated her way through a combination of odds. Unlike several other farmers, she only cultivates food crops. But, she also keeps a cow, a goat and several chickens, assets that she has also needed to sell in the past so as to obtain money with which to lease in additional land or purchase food. Although I did not get into the intricate details of why she eventually stopped frequenting the Tea Estates where her husband worked, Kerubo's contention that she needed to 'concentrate on making a home' seems to have earned her better chances. It enabled her to open up and nurture longer term networks at the place where she knew they would eventually need to return, something that would not have been readily accomplished if she had stayed on at the Kericho Tea Estates only to return upon her husband's retirement in January 1997. While at the Tea Estates, Kerubo was largely a 'guest' and although she assisted her husband in picking tea, this did not provide her with much security. However, the experiences she had while in Kericho earned her a skill that she now utilised so well, tea picking.

Kerubo's ability to interweave opportunities enabled her to live through the 1995 harvest that was otherwise only about 15 percent of her actual annual requirements. She blends her possibilities by seeking out the avenues that are 'open' to her and on a comparative advantage basis. For example, when both Mary and Kwamboka turned down her request for *egeiseri*, Kerubo sought casual labour so as to gain access to markets. And, although *ogotobora* only postponed the problem by reducing her eventual harvest, she took it up because it helped them to get through the most crucial moment. Sometimes, Kerubo was unable to meet their food needs and her children went to bed hungry. But, the drive towards meeting food needs does not always centre around improving access to existing sources. Even when cash income seemed to be their most immediate constraint, Kerubo and her husband spent the largest amount of money that they are likely to have in lump-sum, to put up a *mabati* roofed house. Making a living is a product of several networks, both local and extended. In the process of enroling, coordinating and nurturing her linkages, some of Kerubo's networks were perfected while others crumbled.

Linking up with others, an endangered practice

As explored in Chapters 4 and 5, seeking assistance was a customary practice among the Gusii, aimed at assisting those who encountered shortfalls at harvest. The practice functioned within a specified framework and on the whole, except in cases of severe shortage, there were no reported deficiencies in relying on seeking assistance to bridge the gap between harvests. This cannot however be said of the contemporary performance of social safety nets.

In 1995, 23 households (14%) sought and received assistance from relatives and friends. For ten of these households, this assistance was used to supplement harvests and for the remaining 13, this was utilised alongside harvests and purchases. About 74 percent of the 23 households sought assistance because they had a shortfall from cultivation, ranging from 8 to 85 percent of their food requirements, and equivalent to between 0.7 and 18 bags of maize. In spite of this, a maximum of two bags of maize were received as assistance and this ranged from as little as one tenth of a *debe*. Most of what was given out could only be measurable in tins (*omotoriro*), a much smaller quantity. It takes eight of them to make a *debe* and six *debes* make approximately one 90 kilogramme bag of maize. Hence, in spite of good intentions, the quantities of food received are increasingly becoming only a token measure.[9] Consequently, in spite of having received assistance, 17 of the 23 households had a deficit and therefore only 26 percent of households that sought assistance in 1995 were able to satisfy their demand. By implication, the majority of households that turned to seeking assistance never realised their food needs (cf Table 7.2).

This section looks at the potential in social safety nets as a source of food. I mainly address myself to the likelihood that a household lacking in food could still meet this need by linking up with others. I largely draw on Kerubo's experiences but also make reference to survey data and the other case studies discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

Mobilising food assistance: prospects and limitations

Among the Bambara of Mali, food recipient households are described as poorer, production insufficient and within lineage networks that have slumped into poverty. Donor households are larger, self-sufficient in cereal production and well established in village lineage networks. And, non-participating households are production insufficient and marginalised from exchange networks by choice or unwittingly due to lack of resources to participate (Adams 1993, p.48). Hence, the possibilities that are open to those who may need to seek assistance largely depend on whether these households belong to networks, who they network with and whether they are in a position to reciprocate.

In Kitutu Chache, most households claimed that nobody came to their rescue when they were last faced with food shortages. In general, there was an increasing tendency to keep food needs to oneself for fear that telling others would bring social ridicule. The reluctance to share such information can also be explained in terms of changing circumstances. People have now to make a choice between strengthening social ties or forging ahead with individualised projects. Besides, the processes that occasion a food deficit can no longer be explained in 'excusable' terms. To many would-be benefactors, those seeking assistance may not have worked hard enough, they may have sold their harvest or they may not have invested all that was available to them and, as most people put it, 'money in pockets never talks'. In short, it is impossible to draw the line in an attempt to isolate the food needy. Hence, giving assistance is no longer free flowing due to emerging complications in identifying the food needy.

This task, that earlier had depended on self-identification, has turned into a complex issue because of the diversity and individualisation of livelihood strategies, the privatisation of most factors of production, and the intermingling of conventional indicators. For example, although Kerubo was soon to live in a *mabati* roofed house, a kind of status symbol, she would still qualify for food relief, especially if something were to disorganise the (social) mechanisms that she has in place, but which remain concealed in a multiplicity of networks, most of which are largely invisible to the casual observer.

The complexity of identifying the food needy is further evident when we look at who actually sought and received assistance. In 1995, for example, some of the households that ended up seeking assistance to supplement stocks had realised a surplus at harvest,

ranging between 4 and 90 percent over and above their consumption requirements. Furthermore, although households that handed out assistance harvested an average of 18 bags of maize and the majority (69%) harvested between 6 and 20 bags that year, over one fifth of these households had shortfalls and these averaged about 7 bags, which constituted between 8 and 70 percent of their consumption needs. In addition, the existence of a third category, consisting of households that received and at the same time gave assistance during the same period suggests that giving food aid transcends the potential food position of the benefactor. Moreover, because of little difference between the food security levels of those who give and those who receive assistance, the future of these networks as a source of food is definitely a delicate one.

Food aid has also reduced to small quantities because almost everybody else is equally in need yet they are under some social obligation to assist, even when they can clearly see that their stocks do not warrant sharing. The decision to go ahead and assist anyway is based on the assumption that those who came seeking help have already assessed the benefactor's situation and arrived at the conclusion that they are able to 'spare' some food at that point in time. Ethics surrounding the functioning of social safety nets do not therefore permit sending such seekers away with an 'empty basket'. This, however, also suggests that food security is perceived in terms of meeting very immediate needs. Hence, at the point of giving, the benefactor is actually secure enough to provide to those without hope of having their next meal. In practical terms, however, this reduces their reserve stocks.

Reductions in assistance have been blamed on the introduction of monetary exchanges whereby food has taken on a price.[10] Among the Gusii, the introduction of monetary exchange is seen as having brought about the feeling that *ngina bosa nakwerete Gesabakwa*, meaning free things are long gone.[11] This, however, is not without contradictions. While there are limitations regarding giving things for free, generosity is culturally respected among the Gusii while stinginess is shunned (Chapter 4). This partly explains why storing food in granaries is increasingly less practised. In an attempt to reconcile social expectations with reality, almost all households now store their farm produce inside their houses, away from the social eye. Other reasons include theft and reductions in the period and amounts of food to be stored. It is even felt that the much publicised post-harvest losses as a reason for food insecurity does not really affect smallholders, especially those engaged in bimodal cropping. Their harvests do not last long, and whenever the amounts are substantial, much of this food is sold. Whereas the search for food may not be totally individualised, the majority of households that discontinued giving assistance earliest were those that acquired (some of their) food on the market. This is because 'feeding from the market' is considered a sign of food insecurity and, therefore, what is acquired through purchasing cannot be sought for 'free'. Nevertheless, households that were dependent on other food sources also discontinued giving assistance, further suggesting that it is not just market forces alone that are affecting the functioning of food assistance as a safety net.

The composition of social security networks and in particular the functioning of giving and seeking food assistance has been largely reduced to close kin (parents and siblings). This 'in-breeding' of an insurance mechanism is therefore likely to encourage exclusivity and therefore defeat the central purpose of giving food assistance within the wider kinship network. For example, Kerubo had to resort to markets in spite of her having only meagre resources while Sabina almost always found someone to bail her out. Most of Kerubo's networks were just as needy as herself, they were all subjected to about the same (structural) conditions. Therefore, in the face of a threatening shortfall, she had few options. Her level of desperation is proven by the fact that even *egeiseri*, a very temporary food loan with a fairly specific code of conduct was denied by her network members in critical moments. On the other hand, networks have tended to consist of persons of similar means because being relatively well to do is now creating a barrier towards seeking food assistance. As a practice that is perpetuated by reciprocity, resource poor households find it difficult to seek assistance where they are unlikely to have the opportunity to return the favour, mainly because some potential benefactors are unlikely to need such assistance. Hence, seeking and giving assistance has moved from a social obligation to a practical one. People now give to those from whom they are already benefitting or where they hope to have the opportunity to balance out. Consequently, some of the households that need this platform most, end up not finding anyone who can help, because those who are likely to aid them do not have the means, while those who have the resources may no longer appreciate the value of investing in such networks.

For example, Kerubo's social safety net consisted of a married daughter, a sister, a brother, in-laws in the work group, and a friend. But Kerubo's networks were fragile, as some of the links were unlikely to endure. For instance, Kerubo's son might never become a dependable source of support for his parents. Although he was the only one already through with his education and employed, he did not remit any of his earnings to his parents and he is unlikely to do so soon, given his occupation and the cost of living in a capital city. The weakening of this link is due to 'external' processes, most of which are beyond Kerubo's realm of information and control. Although education enabled Kerubo's son to migrate to Nairobi, his meagre earnings as a Security Guard cannot enable him to secure a livelihood for himself even, let alone 'reciprocating his upbringing' - by giving material support to his parents. And while macro level processes are having a direct impact on the functioning of Kerubo's food security, another of her future network links was ruptured when her daughter dropped out of school. Given Kerubo's meagre resources and in particular the amount of land accessible to her, this daughter would have been a more 'useful' link if she had been engaged off-farm or married off like her elder sister, who was now able to support her mother. Instead, Kerubo's daughter increased the number of people that were dependent on the already meagre resources. However, some network members become more useful after linking up with the 'external' world. Much of Bathseba's decision to

reduce acreage under food crops was based on the confidence arising from the fact that most of her children were independent and some were already remitting material support to her.

The functioning of social safety nets is also affected by reduced proximity. Traditionally, most network members were found within close proximity because there was little out migration. In spite of general improvement in physical infrastructure, dependence on kin relations in the face of constant migrations has become a constraint to seeking assistance. But these spatial changes are however double edged. The fact that some relatives now live far and wide has broadened opportunities, but the cost of travelling to distant places to seek assistance has now to be weighed against the amount of assistance that can be expected. Except for her sister who was 'just across the ridge' and members of her work group, the rest of Kerubo's networks are in distant places. This does not therefore make some of these networks easy to depend on. Reaching any one of them has to be weighed against the benefits and as Kerubo lamented, 'you can easily get to your relative only to find that they too are hungry'. But in the case of her brother, Kerubo depends on his goodwill, his assistance comes to her when he visits.

Therefore, the interaction between giving and receiving food assistance, and the movement towards greater dependence on markets amidst economic differentiation are likely to impact negatively on social networks. However, to step out of the food assistance network, households have to find replacements. What types of options the less endowed have in a changing society and whether these options are likely to take the place of food assistance as once practised, are central concerns. It is not yet clear whether the prevalence of individualisation and increasing commoditisation will eliminate food aid as practised at the local level entirely. This is because the social networks under which food assistance continues to function are embedded cultural practice and in relationships that span a lifetime and more, and as such, they are continuously finding new forms. In addition, new networks emerge through the church, government representatives and with neighbours. How successful these emerging networks will be in addressing food needs at the household level is questionable. As it is, at both national and international levels, food has become a tool to entice some but also a weapon to repulse others. And, although the flow of food aid has remained mutual, in many instances agendas have become less obvious.

Saving lives or livelihoods: the future of social safety nets

I have argued that seeking and receiving assistance is increasingly faced with several challenges. Key among them is the widening gap in the ratio of required food to the quantities that can be obtained through these networks. In addition, the establishment and actual functioning of these networks has been infiltrated by commodity relations,

making their real purpose less fulfilling. Nevertheless, while the practice of giving and receiving assistance in the form of food might be one of the most threatened of the food sources, it is, perhaps, the most resilient of them all. Seeking assistance will therefore continue to play a role in food security, no matter the transformations in its meaning and practice. But, what type of role are social safety nets likely to continue playing: saving lives or livelihoods? This issue is addressed in the context of households that received and/or gave out assistance. The central argument is that whereas receiving assistance might continue to enable households and individuals to live through food shortages, this is less likely to grant them a livelihood, the possibility to do more than struggle to balance their food needs.

Within the Gusii customary framework, social safety nets targeted more than saving lives. Giving assistance was founded on the African philosophy aptly captured in the saying: 'I am because we are and since we are therefore I am'.[12] In the food security context this meant that the existence of the community depended on the individual and vice versa. In Chapter 4 we saw that the community's livelihood depended on the cultivation of staple grains, on fields that were acquired and maintained collectively, mainly with the use of a centrally established defence of common borders and a communally organised expansion farther afield. In turn, food harvests were a source of nourishment, necessary to continue producing. In addition, surplus food was exchanged for necessities and luxuries, the most prestigious being cattle. Indeed, some resource poor persons were able to acquire a wife on account of their food harvest and in the long run, they too could grow to be wealthy through extensive cultivation resulting from an expanded labour force. And, through marriage, individuals immortalised their being and lineage. Availing food to those who did not have adequate amounts enabled households to live through a food shortfall, and given the provisions within which these social safety nets functioned, households could revert back to being sufficient producers of their own food. This assumption is based on the fact that generally, the Gusii enjoyed adequate food supplies, an aspect that came to constitute their self-esteem and identity. And, to date, the Gusii make reference to their trade linkages with the Luo with some amount of pride. Although they exchanged their grain for necessities from the Luo, food surpluses came to form part of the Gusii's legacy (Chapter 4).[13]

In its 'original' practice, seeking and receiving assistance was meant to be a short term coping mechanism, an experience to be avoided. Secondly, seeking assistance was meant to make it possible for beneficiaries to carry on with their more important activities, which at the time, included cultivating the land and aiming at surpluses which could then be exchanged for farm implements and livestock, among other gains. There is therefore a difference between receiving assistance that provides good nutrition and being able to feel more generally secure. The latter allows for reproduction - being able to carry on. I therefore assess the potentiality of receiving assistance at two levels, giving life, and providing a livelihood. The latter entails making it possible for

recipients to engage in more than survival, and this is what marks the difference between a food source that enables households to cope and one that empowers them the next time around. In a way this also means that food security refers to several things, among them, gaining adequate supplies by making trade-offs in equally important areas of life, as is commonly the case in poorer regions of the world, or gaining access to food because this makes perfect the other important areas of life. The latter scenario is the case only in areas where food entitlements function. In the former scenario, much of the productive resources go into consumable goods, a process that then ties such households to a vicious circle of need.

Irrespective of the actual impact of receiving assistance as practised among the Gusii, and in addition to the practical challenges facing this practice, it is now questionable whether this form of assistance will secure existing livelihoods. As Davies argues for Mali, some coping strategies offer uncertain, piecemeal and poorly remunerated means of filling the annual food gap. She therefore differentiates between coping strategies as fall-back mechanisms during periods when habitual food entitlements are disrupted and, coping strategies as outcomes of fundamental and irreversible changes in local livelihood systems (Davies 1993, p.60).[14] I will discuss this in the context of some of the households that received and/or gave out assistance. I focus on what may have been achieved and at what expense. Livelihood is here discussed in light of how it is explored in Chapter 5, but I mainly focus on ability to meet consumption needs, being able to cope with uncertainties, the possibility to do more than attending to nutritional needs, and the trade-offs that must accompany this.

The circumstances surrounding some of the food recipients suggest that depending on food assistance is unlikely to give more than just life. For most of them, this assistance does not alter the structural conditions that drive them into being food needy in the first instance. For example, Bathseba stated that the sister whom she assists lives near Kisii Town (about 40 kilometres away), she is widowed and has little land after having sold most of it. Like Kerubo who is perpetually dependent on her daughter, a sister and a brother, Bathseba's sister is unlikely to meet her food needs the next time around, at least for as long as she continues to seek this through cultivation. She, like Kerubo, has little land and no apparent source of cash income. In addition, Bathseba cannot guarantee that she will be able to continue to provide, since her own access to land could alter drastically if her sons were to want the land subdivided amongst them. Secondly, if Bathseba decides to depend on the market as she has once done, and to support her mother on a continuous basis (because her brothers have nothing to offer her), then her own food needs might be in jeopardy. This suggests that food assistance is now taking place in the context of a lack of resources to produce, an observation that brings us to question the possibility that beneficiaries will be able to get out of this dependency.

Contrary to the expectation that beneficiaries of social safety nets will 'bounce back' to meeting their food needs outside this provision, indications are that households are

now caught in a vicious circle of need. For instance, Yobensiah started running her own 'kitchen' in 1975 and, the same year, she ran out of stocks and resorted to seeking assistance. This did not, however, satisfy Yobensiah's food needs in subsequent years and, in 1977, she turned to markets to augment supplies from cultivation and assistance received. What could easily have been attributed to lack of experience in running a household (as a newly-wed) turned out to be a permanent feature of Yobensiah's food procurement pattern. She now depends on cultivation, seeking assistance and markets for her food supplies. This pattern is, however, not fixed. In 1995, Yobensiah reported that she last sought assistance in 1993, although she purchased food in 1994. And, in 1996, it was obvious that she was going to experience another food shortfall, whose solution she was yet to work out.

Nevertheless, to the extent that households identify with seeking assistance as a practice, and given that those participating continued to respect this as a code of conduct, this form of food aid can be said to have given more than just life. Indeed, Sabina, and by extension her husband were able to continue spending their cash income on the education of their children partly because they could secure their food elsewhere. Similarly, Yobensiah was able to forfeit purchasing her food needs while she paid school fees for her sons primarily because she could count on others. And, the decision by Kerubo and her husband that they spend his pension money to put up a *mabati* roofed house was conceivable because Kerubo knew that she had people to fall back on. This ability to integrate what is otherwise assumed to be a temporary recourse into everyday practice is explained by Davies as resulting from the capacity to adapt the rules within which these coping strategies operate, into general livelihoods (Davies 1993, 60).

Whether coping strategies will provide just life (or no life) or whether they will give a livelihood depends on how individual households interweave these possibilities with their other goals in life. As argued by Davies, if in seeking and receiving assistance households are enabled to forge ahead with the range of projects that they determine as important (no matter the struggles), then these coping mechanisms give more than life (Davies 1993, p.67). Hence, in practice, one person's coping strategy could be another's livelihood.[15]

Markets: a coercive choice or an impending option

The market was a source of food from time to time for 99 (73%) of the 240 households. Most of these households combined markets with cultivation, and a few of them also brought in social safety nets as yet another supplementary source. In 1995, one household moved out of cultivation to depend on markets as the only source of food. But as discussed in Chapter 5, the use of any one or a combination of these sources was

far from definite, and, except for cultivation, most of the others remained just possibilities. There are indications that markets are not the most favoured of the alternatives, although they remain among the most utilised.

This section looks at the potentiality of markets as a source of food among the farm households in Kitutu Chache. I mainly focus on the possibilities that there are, given what people say about markets, what they actually do, and the ease, if any, with which they engage in them.

In 1995, 49 of the 176 households that had at some time used the market as a source of food again turned to purchasing (some of their) staple food. Thirteen of these households combined purchasing with cultivation and seeking assistance. The remaining 36 households supplemented their harvests with purchases only. Although some of the households (33%) that turned to markets in 1995 had actually attained surpluses at harvest, constituting slightly over half a bag to as much as 13 bags in excess of estimated consumption, and ranging between 4 and 290 percent over their consumption needs, the rest of those (67%) that resorted to purchasing had realised shortfalls, ranging from 15 percent to as much as 92 percent of estimated demand. In spite of this, only an average of 2 bags of maize (with a standard deviation of 3.3), was acquired on the market that year. Indeed, 18 of the 49 households purchased only one bag of maize, although a sizeable proportion of the remaining households (32%) purchased between 2 and 13 bags. The rest (31%) purchased less than one bag of maize. Consequently, only 22 of the 49 households that turned to markets in 1995 were able to acquire adequate supplies in that way (cf Table 7.2).

Households turned to purchasing staple food for several reasons. For some this was because their food harvest, either by design or accident, was not sufficient. For others, this followed their having sold more than they could spare to be able to meet more immediate needs. The other category of persons turned to markets after using some of their harvest to bail out relatives and friends. No matter what the reasons for turning to markets for staple food, the greater concern here is that, for the majority (55%) of these households, purchasing did not enable them meet their food deficit. Therefore, are markets really a planned choice, or are they one of those processes of change that rural households must endure?

When do markets become necessary

Households that turned to markets can be described as long time food cultivators. Using 1995 as an example we find that, although the majority of households that engaged markets that year entered maize cultivation in 1969 and the average did so in 1968, the earliest entrant first engaged in growing maize in 1934. This suggests that most households that engaged in purchasing some of their food were seasoned food

crop cultivators, and markets were only one of the sources that they turned to in their search of food. The latter statement is more evident when we look at when these households engaged in alternatives, including making purchases, seeking assistance and hastening the harvest.

From this cohort of households that turned to markets in 1995, purchasing became an option for most of them only in 1980. Nevertheless, the earliest person first turned to markets in 1948, and the need to seek assistance had not become an option until 1966 and, even then, only 55 percent of households that turned to markets in 1995 had ever used social safety nets as a source of food. Eighty four percent of the households that utilised markets in 1995 had over the years engaged in hastening the harvest as a source of food, and this began as early as 1952. The period of entry into markets vis-à-vis other alternative sources of food suggests that markets preceded seeking assistance and other practices such as hastening the harvest. However, while in practice purchasing remains a major source of food, there is a concealed attempt to resist markets. For some households, markets have remained a one-off encounter (Sarah) or a possibility that is yet to be explored (Sabina). On the other hand, markets are an ever present reality, even when the money with which to make these purchases is rather difficult to come by (Kerubo and Yobensiah). Markets therefore emerge as a source of food but into which the food needy are driven without consent. The rest of this section looks at when markets are likely to be considered necessary and for whom in particular.

There is a genuine fear that over dependence on externalities might tie households to a production process which, the next time around, will be dependent on factors that they may not be able to reproduce. Smallholders therefore endeavour to provide part or all of their own household subsistence rather than become entirely market-dependent consumers. Consequently, the Gusii's general view of the market as a last resort and an early sign of food insecurity has persisted. The purchase of staple food (*ogotonda*) is stereotyped and several explanations are offered. People who engage in *ogotonda* are labelled poor planners, careless, ignorant, irresponsible, lacking in foresight, illiterate and lazy. And, as one farmer summed it up, those who depend on markets are like 'birds of the air'. Indeed, among the Embu of Kenya, a good farmer is one who grows enough food crops to feed the family, without purchasing staples and without relying on income from wage labour to purchase goods that could be grown at home (Netting 1993, p.84 citing Haugerud 1989:70). Similarly, among the Massa and Mussey of northern Cameroon,

> 'money is considered too scarce to be spent on such trivial items as food. Besides, food appears traditionally as something which should be produced at family level ... It ranks much lower in priority than the complex prestige circuits of bridewealth ... cattle lending and more recently, possession of modern items ... and drinking' (Garine & Koppert 1988, p.240).

Nevertheless, given the frustrations that farmers reported and the many limitations that they face in cultivation, markets should by now have occupied a special place in their search for food. However, the fact that Chris, a fairly successful cash crop and livestock farmer struggled to grow his own maize suggests that enroling markets goes beyond the logic of a relative advantage. Despite the fact that Chris could afford to acquire his food on the market, entry into markets remained incidental for him. Although he complained that maize cultivation was a near waste of resources, and he was knowledgeable in other possibilities that the land under maize could be put to, and he had fairly good incomes from other farm activities, Chris first turned to the market only in 1980, after growing his food for several years. This decision was occasioned by losing his crop after a prolonged drought that also hit many other parts of the country. To make up for the shortage arising from failure of the main crop, Chris purchased three bags of maize (about 50% of his annual consumption at the time). Similarly, when Chris' parents first purchased maize in 1974, this was as a result of illness in the family. The time spent seeking the father's medication meant that they did not farm effectively and the harvest was poor.

In practice, therefore, markets are to be avoided. Yet, markets continue to remain necessary in spite of the desire to get out of them. For instance, Kerubo started cultivating maize independently in 1964. She entered markets in 1974 and she has remained in them ever since. She explained her entry into markets as resulting from her land size. Kerubo lives on less than one acre of land and, although she supplements it with leasing in additional parcels, her harvest is only a tiny proportion of her consumption. Although she also depends on seeking assistance, this cannot go un-supplemented. Purchasing has therefore remained a necessary source of food for her.

But markets are also resorted to out of choice. This was the case for both Bathseba and Nyaboke. The latter depended on the market because she was occupied off-farm. While running a family shop, Nyaboke found it only prudent to acquire her maize on the market. This, however, changed when proceeds from the family business were directed into the construction of a new house for the family. In 1995, Nyaboke shifted to growing her own her food. Bathseba turned to the market in 1995 but this lasted for only one year because of her motive for purchasing staple food. Although Bathseba pulled out of cultivation so as to make her husband spend some of the coffee and tea earnings on her, she was soon compelled to compliment this with cultivation. She found this combination necessary because it was important for her that her husband should continue to view the need for purchases as only an accident. This points towards the social difficulties involved in deciding to take up markets as a source of food. Although Bathseba (now aged 50) had been cultivating food for over three decades, she could not opt out without a compelling reason. Without her husband's second marriage, she was likely to continue depending on cultivation only, as was the case prior to 1993.

However, although depending on markets contradicts social expectations on how staple food should be secured, there is an emerging appreciation of markets.

Households that turned to purchasing are now also described as well endowed - they have sufficient incomes. But a differentiation continues to be made between those who depend on markets out of choice, *okogora* and those who do so out of need, *ogotonda*. As if to reconcile their thoughts, it is argued that those who opt for markets are town dwellers, they are on a salary. Labelling households that purchase staple food as 'town dwellers' is really to say that if you have land (and you live on it), you have no reasons not to grow your own food. Purchasing, like seeking assistance, is then seen as just a contingency measure that should be avoided. Some farmers felt that only Luos (the neighbouring ethnic community) should engage in purchasing staple food (maize). This partly results from the kind of trade ties that the Gusii had with the Luo (Chapter 4) but it is also grounded in the assumption that soils in the Luo country are less fertile. In real life, however, to purchase or not to purchase is a matter of how opportunities unfold.

Ability to reproduce markets

In pre-colonial Gusii, farming was a way of life and almost everything else anchored around food production. Prosperity derived from successful cultivation of staple grains (combined with subsequent acquisition of livestock) and this came to symbolise well-to-do Gusii. Therefore, through the years, the Gusii accumulated knowledge and skill pertaining to the production and reproduction of resources necessary for the continued functioning of cultivation as a source of life and livelihood. In Chapter 4 we saw that for a considerable period of time, markets were, for the Gusii, an outlet for selling surplus food crops and not for buying them. And, when both tea and coffee were introduced and following a shift in crop demand, the Gusii produced then for both domestic consumption and for the market. Purchasing staple food came to be equated with town dwellers but in the rural areas it was viewed as engaging in the unusual and the undesirable. Although there is, increasingly, a realisation that some town dwellers are unemployed, the general opinion expressed among rural inhabitants is that to live in town is synonymous with being able to buy your own food. The market as a source of food has, for the most part, remained a *transplant* in the food security strategies of rural households.

This study however argues that the credibility of purchasing as a source of food lies with the ability of the consumer to reproduce markets, that is, to balance the value of buying and selling. This refers to the possibility that households will be able to pay for food on the market without being forced to weigh this against several other coercive choices. As it stands, most rural households are in no position to depend on markets for their food needs without jeopardising other aspects of their lives. As such, instead of markets enabling these households to spring from a food security slump, they are likely to entrench them all the more. I will once again use the 49 households that turned to the market in 1995 for illustration.

Although the 49 households that turned to markets in 1995 spent up to eight thousand shillings on staple grain that year, 47 percent of them did not have access to off-farm income. While it is possible that these households may have benefitted from the recommended comparative advantage in cropping, 37 percent of them did not earn any cash from the sale of farm produce. And, those who sold some of their maize that year (29%) only earned an average of Kshs. 450, while the cost of purchasing the same commodity averaged about Kshs. 1,300. Therefore, are rural households able to depend on markets and, if so, to what degree? This discussion will centre on what we know of some of our case studies. The general argument is that most of the households cannot easily reproduce the market as a dependable source of food. Cash incomes are low or non-existent, there are other equally compelling demands that compete for the same money and the alternatives into which households are likely to put their land are less appealing and/or not viable.

In 1995, Sabina's household earned a total of Kshs. 175,600. This money was made up of earnings from her husband's salary as a teacher and payments from the sale of tea, bananas, maize, finger millet and livestock products. Overall, Sabina's earnings were equivalent to Kshs. 14,630 a month.[16] But, this relatively high income was not sufficient for Sabina to use markets for food. In 1995 for example, she resorted to hastening the harvest, *ogotobora*, so as to bridge the gap between harvest periods. Although Sabina stated that her husband had a responsibility to purchase food for them in case of shortages, he had never done so. Instead, besides hastening the harvest period, Sabina turned to seeking assistance from her sisters and her mother-in-law after running out of stocks.

Central to Sabina's decision not to turn to markets is the existence of competing demands for the same money. In order to pay their son's tuition at a private university, Sabina's husband took three commercial loans amounting to Kshs. 120,000. Hence, while their annual income looks good enough to support food needs, their financial commitments are so high that most of this income has to go into servicing loans, in addition to other basics that require constant monetary attention. Therefore, on a comparative basis, although Josephine's annual income of about Kshs. 47,700 is less than one third of Sabina's, the former would be better placed to take up markets as a source of food. Josephine has fewer financial commitments and one of the most demanding things, paying school fees, was already taken care of by her relatives. Similarly, Chris was able to turn to markets, although his annual cash income of Kshs. 28,400 is only a fraction of Sabina's, largely because, unlike Sabina, he did not yet have a child going to university or even secondary school.

Similarly, while Yobensiah continued to supplement her shortfall through a combination of purchases and seeking assistance, she was still not able to link up with markets fully or regularly because her income is meagre and over-stretched. For example, in 1995, income from both coffee and tea combined was only about Kshs. 460 a month. Although Yobensiah also prepares *busaa* for sale, this is a fragile source of

income since it is illegal and dependent on the economic capacity of her clientele, most of whom are subjected to similar hardships and challenges as herself. And, with four of her five children in school, and an off-farm income from only casual labour performed by her husband at a local coffee factory, Yobensiah could not possibly accommodate markets.

We are therefore more likely to see Yobensiah, like Kerubo, oscillating between several sources, in her search for food, with markets as one of the least attractive. Kerubo's situation is the more desperate of the two. Her land holding is much smaller. She grows only maize and, although she receives a wage as a casual farm labourer, these earnings are meagre. In spite of attempting to combine her farmwork with wage labour, Kerubo's income amounted to about Kshs. 6,000 a year. From this money, she has to purchase farm inputs and somewhere along the way, spend some of it to supplement her food harvest, in addition to purchasing other daily needs. Her earnings were also unpredictable and irregular. Working as a casual labourer on other people's farms is not only seasonal but, at the point that one is supposed to maximise, their own work load does not allow it. This is also the 'hungry' period when there is little energy to expend. Hence, whereas Kerubo argued that her husband did not contribute to their welfare while he was still in employment, there are indications that his earnings will be missed. This is because, while in employment, Kerubo's husband paid school fees and he lived with some of their children away at the Kericho Tea Estates. Given that he retired in January 1997, they all must now contend with their small piece of land. Already, Kerubo's husband was engaged in casual labour and, other than the *mabati* roofed house, his pension money was only able to purchase just one goat and a sheep. While these two animals provide some insurance, their premium is limited. And, without underrating the resilience in human capability, it is evident that markets will only remain Kerubo's option at very high cost.

Who, then, is likely to accommodate to markets? Not even those households that seem to enjoy good incomes with relatively fewer commitments. For example, both Nyaboke and Sarah had annual incomes of about Kshs. 61,000 and Kshs. 67,000, respectively. However, neither of these two women was likely to turn to the market as a source of food. Although Nyaboke was once dependent on the market for her food needs, she had to opt out of it when her husband closed down a family business that she was running, and which paid for these purchases. And much as her husband is still in employment, he now expects her to procure the family's food through cultivation and has made it possible for her to do so by acquiring some additional land from a relative. Sarah too could not possibly turn to the market because the family's cash income went directly to her husband who preferred to spend it on farm inputs for her, while he put the rest of the money into school fees, among other needs. Therefore, to Nyaboke and Sarah, markets may not be a successful or even a choice as the decision lies with someone else. So far, markets have been brought in as a source of farm inputs, but even then, this only covers those inputs that are not available on-farm. Stephen expects Sarah

and her co-wife to provide the more important of the inputs, labour. While this careful engagement of markets could be assessed as resulting from some opportunity-cost logic, it is also an indication that most income-generating activities that rural households engage in are not profitable enough to shoulder several basic expenses. In fact, whereas Bathseba resorted to markets to avenge her husband's disproportionate allocation of family income, she was still not able to enjoy adequate supplies. The following year (1996), Bathseba turned to combining markets with cultivation, and much as she suggested that this was to conceal her motive regarding entry into markets as a source of food, it is also apparent that markets on their own could not satisfy her food needs. She did not have direct access to the family income, and in any case, these earnings were not high enough to warrant total dependence on the market.[17] As it is, during the period that Bathseba bought food on the market, she also received some maize from one of her sons.

On a comparative basis, therefore, markets provide less of an opportunity than that offered by cultivation. What we are likely to continue seeing in this part of the country and elsewhere is a combination of several sources in an attempt to secure adequate food.

There was, nevertheless, a selective use of markets. Over two thirds of the 240 households obtained some of their vegetables on the market. And, although on a smaller scale, some households also acquired finger millet, sorghum, bananas and sweet potatoes. But, most purchases were sporadic and impromptu. It is risky in situations where supply fluctuates and yet, much of the decision to purchase anchors on whether and when 'funds become available'.

Bridging the food gap: in the absence of markets and social safety nets

It is assumed that once households face a shortfall in harvests, be it by design or accident, they will turn to any one or a combination of available sources, and once they do so, this will result in adequate food. On the contrary, in 1995 for example, not all households that experienced a shortfall turned to other sources for additional supplies. Secondly, not all those who turned to other sources were able to obtain the required amounts of food. Of the 59 households that turned to markets and social safety nets to augment their food harvest, only 25 of them managed to meet their food needs. In addition, 54 of the 180 households that depended on cultivation only for their food needs did not obtain sufficient harvests. Neither did the one household that depended on markets only for food, obtain sufficient supply (Table 7.2).

Table 7.2 Who was and who was not able to obtain adequate food supplies relative to the sources of food that households utilised in 1995

source of food	food secure households (n=)	food deficit households (n=)	row total (n=)
cultivation only	126	54	180
cultivation with purchases	19	17	36
cultivation with seeking assistance	3	7	10
cultivation, purchases & assistance	3	10	13
purchases only	0	1	1
column total (n=)	151	89	240

Source: Field Survey, 1995

Therefore, how did the 89 households (37%) with an obvious food deficit survive? In Chapter 4, we saw that in the face of severe food shortages, households and individuals resorted to measures that were otherwise considered appalling. These included migrating outside their ethnic boundaries, giving up some of their children, consuming what was otherwise not eatable, and appealing to the colonial administration to make food available. It is therefore my assumption that households that did not obtain adequate food supplies through harvests, purchases and seeking assistance may still have found a solution, but probably one that did not necessarily fortify their food security. This is evident from the following two examples.

Extending self-sufficiency, hastening the harvest

Removing maize from the fields before it is ready to harvest is a practice that is commonly used to bridge the gap between harvest periods. Locally referred to as *ogotobora*, the operation entails removing what is otherwise wet maize from the fields and sun drying it until it is suitable for milling. Close to 61 percent (146) of households in the study area had engaged in this practice over time. Most of them explained that they were forced to remove wet maize from their farms because they had run out of stocks and they were not able to purchase and/or receive assistance. A few households resorted to *ogotobora* because there was no maize on the market, directly challenging their faith in markets as an alternative source of food. But, the fact that households engaged in *ogotobora* did not necessarily imply that they always resorted to this. For example, some of the households that had taken up purchasing as a source of food were

among the first to disengage from meeting their food needs in *ogotobora*, in spite of having remained among the dominant users of this practice as a source of food, further suggesting that their involvement in markets is unpredictable but is a better alternative, when possible, to picking immature maize.

In 1995, 54 households engaged in *ogotobora*. In addition to cultivation, 26 of these households purchased some food and 19 sought and received assistance. In general, an average of 8 bags of maize was obtained from harvests although 44 percent of the households harvested only 5 bags or less and 17 percent harvested between 10 and 35 bags. Cultivation did not, however, meet the food needs of over 70 percent of these 54 households, and even with supplies from purchases and assistance, 65 percent of the households still had a food deficit, averaging about 55 percent of their consumption needs.

Picking unripe maize served two categories of households: those who obtained adequate supplies at harvest but could not retain these stocks through out the year for various reasons, and households that faced a food deficit even after making purchases and receiving assistance. For example, although both Sabina and Kerubo engaged in *ogotobora* in 1995, Sabina's maize harvest for that year was about thrice what she required to meet her consumption needs, while Kerubo's was only 15 percent of her estimated consumption. Hence, while Sabina engaged in *ogotobora* so as to bridge the gap between her two harvest periods and she was successful, Kerubo was not, even after turning to making purchases and seeking assistance. Alongside the suggestion that *ogotobora* can only take care of slight deficits, utilising this technique depends on when one runs out of food. If this takes place close to harvesting time, when *ogotobora* is also possible, then the strategy is likely to be of some use. However, households that run out of food long before harvesting time must look elsewhere.

It was not possible to ascertain whether turning to *ogotobora* enabled most households meet their food requirements. And, while it can be assumed that (some) households met their needs, hastening the harvest is only a short term intervention that does not necessarily enhance a household's ability to escape falling victim the next time around. As Kerubo re-counted, because she engaged in *ogotobora*, her actual output was always low and, soon after harvest, her granary was empty again. An 'empty granary' forced her to take up 'contracts' over and above her monthly wage as a casual labourer so as to purchase food. She also turned to networking with relatives and friends in order to qualify for assistance. However, while *ogotobora* is not feasible on a long term basis since it does not improve yields, as a coping strategy this practice cannot be ignored, it does enable households to live with food shortages.

Alternative diet

Hastening maturation as a practice brings out human resourcefulness. But it is also a measure of desperation when farmers go out of their way to sun dry wet maize to the degree that it can be milled into flour. More than this however, stimulating physiological maturity in maize for the purpose of milling implies some great attachment to consuming this maize in the form of flour. There are several other ways to transform wet maize into food ready for consumption without milling it. These include boiling the maize grain, and possibly mixing it with beans, a practice that was common among the Gusii before *posho* mills became known and available (Chapter 4).

To what extent then can we assume that households that were faced with staple food deficits attempted to adjust to other foods? In rational terms, this would be the expectation especially in a near famine situation. However, as long as people feel that they can make a choice, there is a tendency to hold on to what they consider to be basic food. Hence, although Kenya's food policy recommends growing other food crops such as cassava, sorghum and sweet potatoes as one way of relieving the current stress on high potential land (Kenya SP No.2 1994, p.21), the data from Kisii suggests that, except for near famine situations, there is little movement towards taking up alternative foods.

Whereas both finger millet and sorghum were cultivated by the Gusii on a large-scale before the advent of maize milling facilities (Chapter 4), and about 60 and 63 percent of the households cultivated sorghum and finger millet respectively in 1995, this was only on a tiny scale. Over 90 percent of households put less than one acre of land under these crops, compared to maize. Moreover, only a maximum of 6 bags of finger millet were harvested in 1995 and the majority (63%) of households harvested less than one bag. This was even lower for sorghum, where a maximum of three bags were harvested and 58 percent of the households harvested less than one bag. And, whereas 16 and 47 (of the 240) households purchased some sorghum and finger millet respectively, this was, for over 87 percent of them, less than half a bag.

Furthermore, except for 5 percent of the households that consumed a *debe* of finger millet and sorghum flour[18] in one week or less, the majority (67%) of households took one month to complete a similar quantity of finger millet flour. In the case of maize, over 80 percent of the households consumed one *debe* in at most seven days. Although *ugali* made from finger millet flour is considered a delicacy, finger millet is now commonly utilised in the preparation of porridge (a snack meal). Some people obtain finger millet grain for purposes of generating *ememera*, a form of yeast that is used in preparing local brew.

Despite the obvious attachment to maize relative to finger millet/sorghum, other foods were also grown and used as supplements. These included bananas and sweet potatoes. For example, in 1995, only 50 percent of the households with a food deficit sold bananas, suggesting therefore that the rest consumed them on-farm. Seventeen percent of these households purchased bananas that year. But bananas, like many other

non-cereals, such as sweet and Irish potatoes, are only preferred for lunch, as they are considered to be only snack foods. Furthermore, only 26 percent of the households that did not obtain adequate maize purchased sweet potatoes and even fewer of them planted sweet potatoes. Although sweet potatoes were introduced in Kisii during colonial rule, they have remained the famine crop that they were supposed to be at the point of being introduced, and with land pressure, their already marginal status has deteriorated further.[19]

Hidden hunger

The aim of this chapter was to dig deeper into people's livelihoods and in particular focus on the challenges facing the choices households face beyond cultivating some or none of their food. I have looked at what else households bring on board, in an attempt to obtain adequate food. We have seen that despite the temporary nature of some of the mechanisms that households devise so as to cope with shortfalls, and, disregarding the trade-offs that they engage in while making purchases, resolving food security problems is an integral part of rural livelihoods. Therefore, whereas entitlement relations as discussed by Amartya Sen remain central to explaining these food security patterns, what takes place at the exchange mapping level depends on much more than one's endowment bundle. It is a function of how other equally significant components of life evolve, which then account for the contradictions that tend to characterise the search for food at the rural household level. Hence, as long as people continue to devote a major portion of their resources to resolving food needs, and almost on a day-to-day basis, they will continue to experience some form of food insecurity, much of which may remain hidden. In Chapter 8, I focus on the complexity arising from the fact that obtaining adequate food continues to elude some but not others.

Notes

1. In general, deciding on what is sufficient food has drawn varied suggestions. See for example Osmani (1990); Babu & Pinstrup-Andersen (1994); Kennedy & Haddad (1992); Nyborg & Haug (1994). cf Douglas & Isherwood 1978.

2. This refers to the ratio of supply to demand. Supplies consist of maize that was obtained through harvests, purchases and seeking assistance. *Actual* demand is here used to refer to the amount of maize that a given household consumes in a year. As already explained, this projection is based on how long a *debe* of maize lasted in each of the households that were interviewed. This was then projected for a one year period (52 weeks). Six *debes* constitute one

90 kilogramme bag of maize. For example, in a household where one *debe* of maize milled lasted for a week, it was assumed that such a household would require 52 *debes* of maize in a year. This was then compared with the amount of maize that such a household was able to obtain over a one year period (1995), through cultivation, purchases or seeking assistance. The ratio constitutes their food security position (see Chapter 6).

3. This is a ratio of supply to demand based on caloric requirements. Computations were arrived at by getting the proportion of available food (bags x 90kgs x 3300kcal) to caloric requirements from maize (household size x 2200kcal x 365days x 0.75) per year. Ref: J. Hoorweg, personal communication.

In these computations, it is assumed that maize contributes about 75% of the amount of daily calories required by each person. The supply-demand ratio could be higher or lower depending on how this level of contribution is perceived. For example, the Department of Agriculture in Kisii has pegged this contribution at less than 50%, a figure that tends to generate the conclusion that the district is largely food secure.

4. *Egeiseri* is a form of food aid that involves borrowing flour from a neighbour, for example. Unlike *ogosuma* which is treated as a long term debt, *egeiseri* is a very specific 'loan'. It is given in flour form and returned at the earliest opportunity, often as soon as the recipient mills her next maize. This food aid is so specific that it is returned in like measure, actually in the same container that is used to carry away what is given out. While *ogosuma* is meant to take care of a shortfall in the long run and which might never occur, *egeiseri* is used to meet unanticipated demand for flour (see Chapter 5).

5. Kerubo's brother has a special relationship with her. Her bridewealth went into paying for his school fees, an investment that must have largely contributed to his current status. According to Gusii customs, other than the eldest daughter's bridewealth which is meant for her father, each son was entitled to the bridewealth from one of his sisters, in order of birth. Those who missed such a chance as a result of not having a sister to match, were assisted through contributions from the community. But in most cases, such persons had to work extra hard to accumulate enough grain which they then exchanged for livestock (or a bride for those who married from very poor and therefore food deficit homes). In many instances therefore, brothers tended to be closest to the sister from whom they benefitted.

6. The functioning of social safety nets is regulated by social ridicule. The amount of stigma attached to being seen to be 'begging' as a result of not working hard (in food production) makes it possible that only genuine needs will receive the community's attention in terms of assistance and sharing. However, the shift away from cultivation as the only source of food makes it impossible to rate hard work, at least at face value.

7. cf Whitehead 1990.

8. *Omonyamwaka* is used in reference to migrant labour. Literally meaning 'persons that return home only once a year' (*omwaka*), the term is now used to refer to those men who have deserted their homes. They are often in some wage form of employment (mostly in an urban setting) but do not make any remittances to those they have left behind in the countryside, mainly a wife and children. Their households are therefore basically run by their wives. Some of these men, however, left before marrying. At the time, poor transport facilities was the main excuse for not visiting those left behind more frequently. Other modes of communication too were limited.

9. In practice assistance given out previously is estimated to have been a head-load of maize (or finger millet), often conceptualised as several *debes*. This has reduced over the years. For instance, whereas most households used to give two to four *debes* when they helped out, the majority now reported giving more recently only one *debe* or less.

10. See Raikes 1988; Adams 1993 and cf Hyden 1983.

11. This expression embodies the Gusii's perception of markets. Gesabakwa was the name given to the place that was once a meeting point during barter trade times and which later became a market centre, and therefore the perceived origin of this new idea of not giving anything for free.

12. Referring to this as a cardinal point in the understanding of the African view of man, John Mbiti argues that only in terms of other people does the individual become conscious of his (her) own being. He thus concludes that what happens to the individual happens to the whole and whatever happens to the whole happens to the individual (Mbiti 1974, p.108).

13. In addition, while contending that fortunes change (*bonda imbo'nchorerani*), the Gusii explain that individuals have the ability to make a turn around. In customary Gusii, this was mainly seen to derive from a bumper harvest which could then be exchanged for livestock. One's fortunes could also spring up once a home with several daughters began to receive bridewealth, in the form of livestock. But, for those with many sons, this marked the beginning of a reduction in their livestock herd.

14. Davies then concludes that coping strategies that are not adapted to meeting livelihood needs prevent people from 'moving ahead' (Davies 1993, p.60). Indeed, at national and international levels, there is a debate regarding the best way to give food aid (see Devereux 1993a, p.164; Sen 1990a, p.41; Raikes 1988, p.238; de Waal 1989b). However, the chances of arriving at an objective decision about how best to assist the food needy are clouded by the motives behind giving aid. Paarlberg (1994, p.403) has classified these motives into: compassion, self-interest and the caretaker complex.

15. For example, it has been observed that, during the 1984-85 famine in Sudan, the goal among those affected was to preserve a way of life. This entailed being able to retain their animals, buy seed and hire labour (de Waal 1990, p.475). In other words, these people's immediate needs went beyond nourishment to include ability to carry on. See also Devereux 1993b, p.53-58.

16. Given Sabina's food demand, estimated at seven bags of maize per year, she would have required less than Kshs. 15,000 to meet this demand on the market, in the period 1995/96. cf prices in Chapter 1.

17. Her husband's declared annual income of Kshs. 10,500 is equivalent to only 7 bags of maize. This approximates only about 50% of Bathseba's food requirements. In addition, absolute purchasing is inconceivable as it excludes the multiple uses into which such income must be put.

18. At milling, finger millet is often mixed with sorghum and cassava.

19. Although sweet potatoes are widely consumed in several parts of Kenya, they are yet to be accepted as a main dish (Omosa 1997). To date, most Gusii families that do not have *ugali* for the evening meal will consider themselves food insecure.

CHAPTER 8

THE COMPLEXITY OF HOUSEHOLD FOOD SECURITY: HOW SOME SUCCEED WHILE OTHERS FAIL

> 'Food security defies conventional boundaries. It exists in mid-income as well as low income countries, the food self-sufficient and the food-deficit, the drought prone and the drought free ... those with generally sound economic growth policies as well as those without, those facing civil disturbance as well as those at peace, those undergoing adjustment and those outside the adjustment process, those where the government and the Bank spend a lot of time agonizing over the subject and those where it is largely ignored' (World Bank 1988, p.3).

According to the entitlements approach, food security flows from possessions and these possessions stem from endowments which then constitute a person's entitlements or ownership bundle. This approach further argues that endowments in themselves are not synonymous with adequate food, they only relate to a potential output and this is determined at the exchange mapping level (Chapter 2). In other words, a household's food security depends on what they own, and more critically, on what this ownership can command, that is, how much food can be obtained relative to this ownership bundle. As such, although 'success' or 'failure' to obtain adequate food are potentially inherent in endowments, this only takes effect at the point of exchanging these endowments with required food. Hence, in addition to the resources that are available to rural households, the possibilities that these resources offer in terms of meeting food needs is crucial in explaining variations in command over food and who actually successfully procures adequate supplies. Accordingly, a household's food security position depends on the resources that the household has access to, and the nature of exchange mappings that these endowments portend. Failure to command adequate food is then assumed to result from a collapse in one's entitlement or a breakdown in the network of entitlement relations.

Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 have, however, demonstrated that while command over adequate food depends on one's ownership bundle, the actual outcome derives from how individual households organise the search for this food. Hence, what one owns and what this ownership can command depend on much more than 'entitlements'. Instead, meeting food needs results from constant negotiation, both at the point of gaining access to resources (endowments) and during the process of exchanging these resources for required food. I have therefore argued that what constitutes endowments, and whether these translate into adequate food is an outcome of a process. This is located in social, cultural, economic and political transformations, and more importantly, in how individual households *interact* with these processes. In other words, food security is a function of how households organise resources at hand, how they interweave their experiences and the kinds of network they establish and nurture,

in an attempt to meet their food needs. In this chapter, I now seek to show how in managing these 'entitlements', only some succeed while others fail. I also strive to bring out some of the discrepancies that continue to dominate the search for adequate food at the rural household level.

Differentiation within and between food security clusters

In 1995, out of a total sample of 240 households, 180 of them pursued their food needs through cultivation only. The remaining 60 households combined cultivation with purchases (36), seeking assistance (10), or purchases combined with seeking assistance (13). One household depended solely on the market (Chapter 5). Most of the food supplies (3,176 bags) were drawn from harvests (3,080 bags) supplemented with purchases (75 bags), seeking assistance (11 bags) or purchases combined with seeking assistance (10 bags).

In all, 151 households obtained sufficient supplies. These were distributed, although not evenly, across all the five food security strategies as follows: 70 percent of the households that engaged in cultivation only as a source of food obtained adequate food. They were followed by households that supplemented cultivation with purchases (53%), seeking assistance (30%) or purchases combined with seeking assistance (23%). The one household that depended on purchasing only did not balance food demand with supply. Therefore, broadly, two food security clusters are evident, that of households that managed to obtain adequate food supplies and another consisting of households that failed to do so during the same period (Figure 8.1).[1]

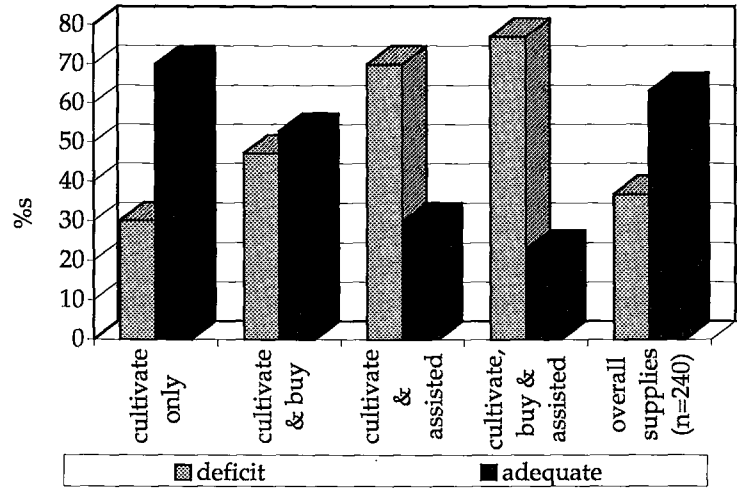


Figure 8.1 The relationship between food strategies and the food security position of households
Source: Field Survey, 1995

Looking at the performance of each of the above strategies, as sources of food, suggests two realities. One refers to the likelihood that a strategy is dependable to the extent that it can offer sufficient food and the other refers to the ability of the user to engage in this strategy, no matter the result. Hence, while it could be concluded that some food security strategies offer better chances of success than others, it is also implicit that success or failure hinges on the ability to *command* the selected technique.[2] The rest of this chapter is a search for relationships. Using the food security strategies delineated in Chapter 5 and following discussions in Chapters 6 and 7 on how households actualise the search for adequate food, I now look into the differences that there may be within and between households that manage to obtain adequate supplies and those that fail to do so. I mainly focus on who has command over adequate food, what underlies this command, is this command sufficient and/or predictable, at what cost is this command gained, and, who fails altogether to gain command over adequate supplies.

For purposes of this analysis, I follow Sen's categorisation of food entitlements (Sen 1981, p.2), but from the point of view of how this is practised in Kitutu Chache, Kisii District.[3] In general, I seek to highlight the differences, if any, between and within households that obtained adequate food supplies in 1995 and those that faced a deficit vis-à-vis the strategies they employed during this search. Although the proportion of food supplies to consumption ranged from a deficit of more than 50 percent to surpluses amounting to 700 percent or more, I have split this into two groups, namely households with a deficit (37%) and those that obtained adequate food (63%) in 1995. While in real life this condition is more intricate than the compartmentalisation applied here, this 'snapshot' is necessary so as to make further analysis possible. This does not therefore negate the fact that levels of command vary and the nature of trade-offs diverge.

The discussion that follows is largely descriptive. It is based on a field survey that I conducted at the end of 1995. The aim is to recapitulate issues, already alluded to in the various case studies, by illustrating how the factors that are assumed to constitute entitlements to food perform at the exchange mapping level, and the kinds of patterns that emerge. I mainly focus on household composition, resource endowment, income levels, and management of food supplies. The general observation is that none of these factors fully explains the apparent differentiation towards gaining command over adequate food.[4]

Household size

There was an average of seven persons in the 240 households that were interviewed, ranging between two and twelve. Eighty households (33%) consisted of between 6 and 7 members and another 67 (28%) had 8 to 9 people. Only eleven households (5%) had three persons or fewer and another 53 (22%) constituted 4 to 5 persons. Twenty nine households (12%) had 10 or more people. Most of these household members were

resident children. Except for eight households that did not have a child, the rest had an average of five children, ranging between one and eleven.

In general, command over required food varied with the number of consumers. For example, whereas 90 percent of households with only three or fewer members obtained adequate food, this was the case for only 62 percent of households with 10 or more persons. Similarly, about 70 percent of households with 4 to 5 members obtained adequate food supplies compared to 60 and 58 percent among households with 6 to 7 and 8 to 9 persons, respectively. Although this pattern tends to go along with general assumptions that food shortages result from having more people to feed, we also note that some of the households that failed to obtain adequate food during the same period were of relatively smaller sizes (Figure 8.2-a).

This apparent, although non-linear, influence of household size on the food position of households cut across the various food security strategies that these households employed but in a diversity of ways. For example, among households that depended on cultivation only, command over adequate food was highest for those with three or fewer people (88%) and those with the most number of household members (80%). The proportion of households that were able to obtain adequate supplies among those with 4 to 9 members ranged between 62 and 77 percent (Figure 8.2-b). On the other hand, command over adequate supplies for households that supplemented their food harvest with purchases was absolute among those with three persons or fewer. But this success in obtaining adequate food among the rest of the households that turned to purchasing reduced, although not consistently, with increase in household size, culminating in only 25 percent among households with 8 or more persons (Figure 8.2-c). Similarly, success in seeking assistance was more favourable with smaller households. Whereas all the households of three or fewer succeeded in obtaining adequate supplies, none of those with 4 to 5 and 8 or more persons did. Nevertheless, the rate of success was 50 percent among households with 6 to 7 persons (Figure 8.2-d). And, ability to obtain adequate supplies among households that had to rely on more than two strategies (cultivation, purchasing and seeking assistance) was much lower and it reduced with an increase in the size of the household. Consequently, all households that sought their food needs through cultivation in combination with purchasing and seeking assistance and had 10 or more persons to feed, failed to obtain adequate supplies (Figure 8.2-e).

In general, the use of more than one source of food was more successful among relatively small households. However, as the number of consumers increased, households that depended on cultivation only, performed better compared to those that needed to turn elsewhere for additional supplies. For example, only 20 percent of households with 10 or more persons that depended on cultivation only failed to obtain adequate supplies, while over 70 percent of households that supplemented through purchases failed to do so. Furthermore, all households with 10 or more persons who supplemented cultivation with seeking assistance or with purchases and seeking assistance failed to meet their food needs.

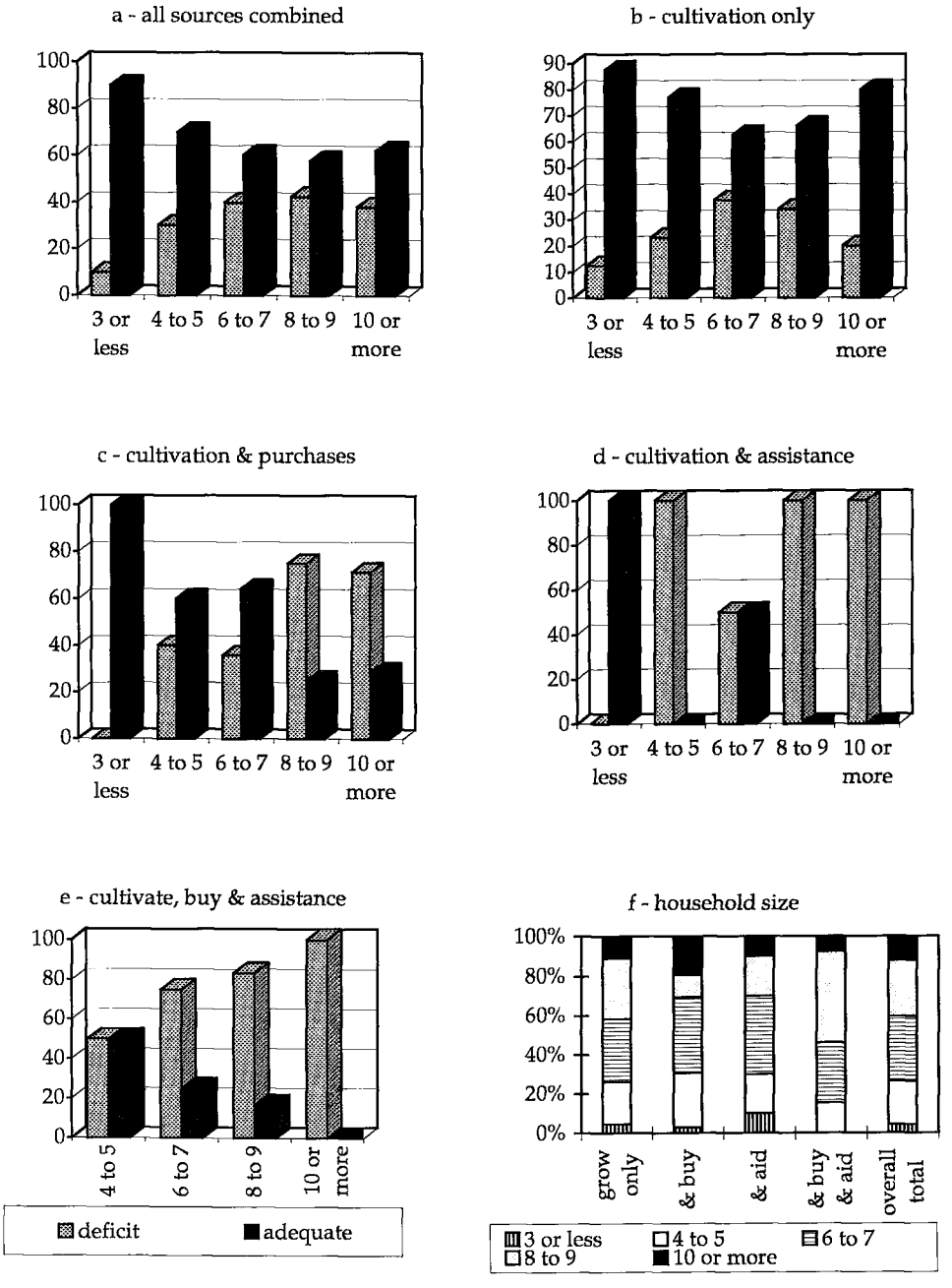


Figure 8.2 A comparison between household size and the food position of households
Source: Field Survey, 1995

Therefore, both purchasing and seeking assistance are more favourable with smaller households. Households that require large quantities of food cannot effectively depend on these mechanisms.

Hence, if cultivation is favourable in larger households and multiple strategies are more successful with smaller numbers, some households pursue strategies that are not technically suitable for their circumstances. For example, although both purchasing and aid were more favourable with households of three persons or less, about 40 percent of the households that used each of these as a source of food were those with 6 to 7 persons. Furthermore, about one fifth (19%) of households that turned to the market for additional food had 10 or more persons in their households, while this was the case for only 11 percent of households that sought their food needs through cultivation only. Indeed, over three quarters (77%) of the households that turned to both purchasing and seeking assistance for additional supplies had between 6 and 9 persons (Figure 8.2-f). This suggests that part of the failure to obtain adequate food is a result of the pursuit of strategies that cannot enable households to have sufficient command over required food. But, in making these choices, several other considerations come into play. Most households are faced with a multiplicity of obligations, but with few financial resources.

Life cycle

It is implicit from the above discussion that success in gaining command over adequate food goes beyond numbers to include what else takes place in the specific households and related networks. For instance, the age composition of household members will influence ability to obtain food both in terms of the quantities that will be required and the methods that could possibly be used to secure it. In Chapter 4 we saw that, as long as land was plenty, households with many children obtained adequate food supplies. Even then, this varied with age and sex. Households with several young men benefitted from having people who could open up the frontiers, and these young men also cleared the fields for cultivation. On the other hand, daughters assisted their mothers in cultivation and, unlike the young men, these girls stored their food harvest with their mothers for general use, while the young men used the same as a source of accumulation. Although this is no longer the practice, household composition remains important. I will illustrate this by looking at the age distributions for the oldest child and that of the household head.

Ninety six households (40%) were headed by persons aged between 31 and 45 years. Another 84 of them (35%) were aged between 46 and 60 years, 34 (14%) were between 61 and 75 years and 24 (10%) were aged 30 years and below. Two households belonged to persons in their late 70s or older.

As might be expected, a comparison between the age distribution of household heads and the food security position of their households indicates that, in general, younger households enjoy a higher command over required food. This reduced with age. Eighty

seven percent of the households that were headed by persons aged 30 years or below obtained adequate food, 68 percent did so where the head was between 31 and 45 years, 56 percent where the head was between 46 and 60 years and 48 percent among households headed by persons aged between 61 and 75 years (Figure 8.3-a).

Command over adequate food thus varied with life cycle, but this too depended on the food procurement strategy that households pursued. Among households that depended on cultivation only, all those headed by persons in their mid 70s or older were able to obtain adequate food supplies and this was also the case for 90 percent of households headed by persons aged 30 or below. This however reduced to 75 percent among those aged between 31 and 45 years. Only 63 and 54 percent of households headed by persons aged 46 to 60 and 61 to 75, respectively managed to meet their food needs through cultivation (Figure 8.3-b).

Supplementing cultivation with purchases was least successful among those households headed by persons advanced in age. Only 40 percent of households that turned to purchasing and were headed by persons aged 61 to 75 years managed to obtain adequate food. Moreover, all households that resorted to purchasing and were headed by persons in their late 70s failed to balance their food demand with supply (Figure 8.3-c). Seeking assistance as a source of food was least favourable among the relatively young. All households belonging to persons aged below 30 years failed to balance their food demand with supply through seeking assistance. Although this improved to 50 percent among those households headed by persons of 31 to 45 years, it again dropped to nil among households headed by persons aged 46 years or more (Figure 8.3-d). Households that combined seeking assistance with purchasing as supplementary sources were headed by persons aged between 31 and 60 years and, in general, they did not enjoy any particular command over adequate food (Figure 8.3-e).

The general observation that households headed by younger persons have a relatively better command over obtaining required food derives from the possibility that, these households have fewer responsibilities, in particular fewer mouths to feed and better opportunities. For example, although households headed by both the relatively young and the elderly had a better command over cultivation as a source of food, the latter failed to command markets as a source of food, whereas all households that were headed by persons aged 30 years or below were able to balance their food demand with supply, through purchasing. Similarly, seeking assistance was less favourable with households headed by the relatively young and the aged.

In spite of the above pattern, the age distribution of these heads of households cut across all the food security strategies, with a major concentration among those aged between 31 and 60 years (Figure 8.3-f). While this suggests that some of the households may have been seeking their food needs through sources over which they had high command, performance also depends on the nature of other commitments within each of these households.

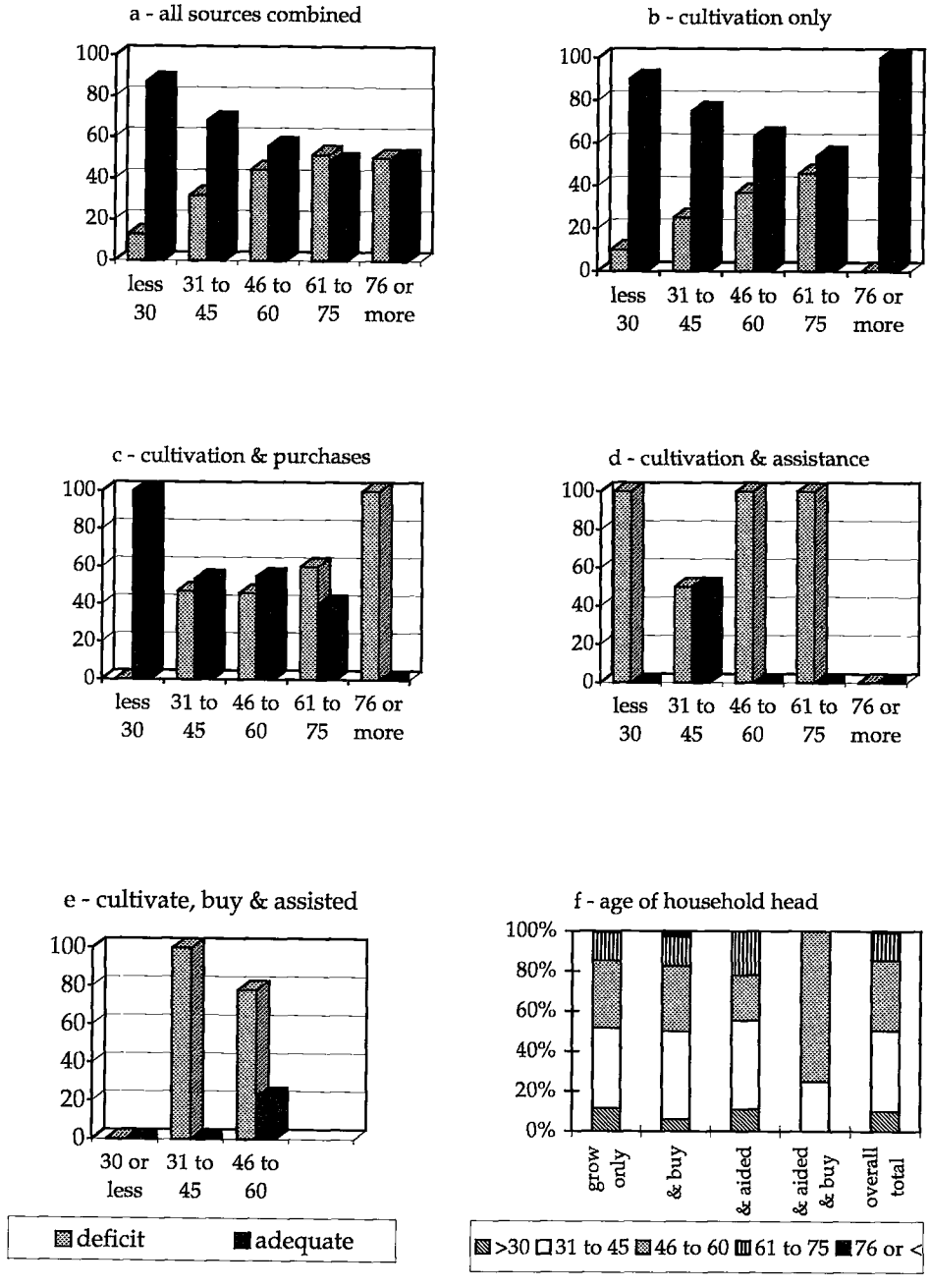


Figure 8.3 A comparison between the food position of households and age of household heads
Source: Field Survey, 1995

In households where there are children, most activities will tend to centre on providing for them and even aspirations about the future will revolve around them. Later on in life, these children come to form part of strong networks. Some of these networks become a source of material support, but others end up needing such support if, for example they become single parents without an income. Such circumstances then impact on how these households are likely to organise their food needs and the level of success that they may attain.

All except eight of the 240 households had resident children. For 174 of them, the youngest child was below 10 years of age. In 48 households these children were aged between 11 and 20 years. Only in 10 households was the youngest child aged 21 years or more. In 153 of the households, the oldest child was aged 16 years or more. In another 67 households they were between 6 and 15 years. The oldest child in the remaining 12 households was aged five or below. However, contrary to previous practice where households with older children would benefit from available labour, among other forms of assistance (Chapter 4), most of these households do not enjoy an adequate command over required food because of changes in the role of children. I will illustrate this by looking at the food position of these households relative to the age of their oldest child.[5]

In general, households with a young family had a better command over food supplies. For example, whereas 82 percent of households with their oldest child aged five years or below obtained adequate food, this was the case for only 55 percent among households with their oldest child aged 21 years or more. This command was however highest among households whose oldest child was aged between 6 and 10 years (Figure 8.4-a). Therefore, that there are still variations even within households that enjoy a considerable command over adequate food is a further indication of the diversity in factors that determine command over obtaining adequate food.

In addition, command also varied with the strategies households employed to secure food. In general, households with young children had a better command while pursuing their food needs through cultivation only, relative to cultivation in combination with seeking assistance or purchases. This influence, however, differed within each strategy.

Among households that depended on cultivation only, ability to obtain adequate food decreased with an increase in the age of their children. Hence, whereas 90 percent of households with children aged five years or below obtained adequate food, this reduced to about 79 percent among those with children aged 6 to 10 years. And, although over 70 percent of households with children of 11 to 20 years obtained adequate supplies through cultivating only, this reduced to 63 percent among those with children aged 21 years or more (Figure 8.4-b). On the other hand, all households with their eldest child aged five years or less and who turned to purchasing failed to obtain adequate food, yet all their counterparts with the eldest child aged 6 to 10 years succeeded in obtaining required food (Figure 8.4-c).

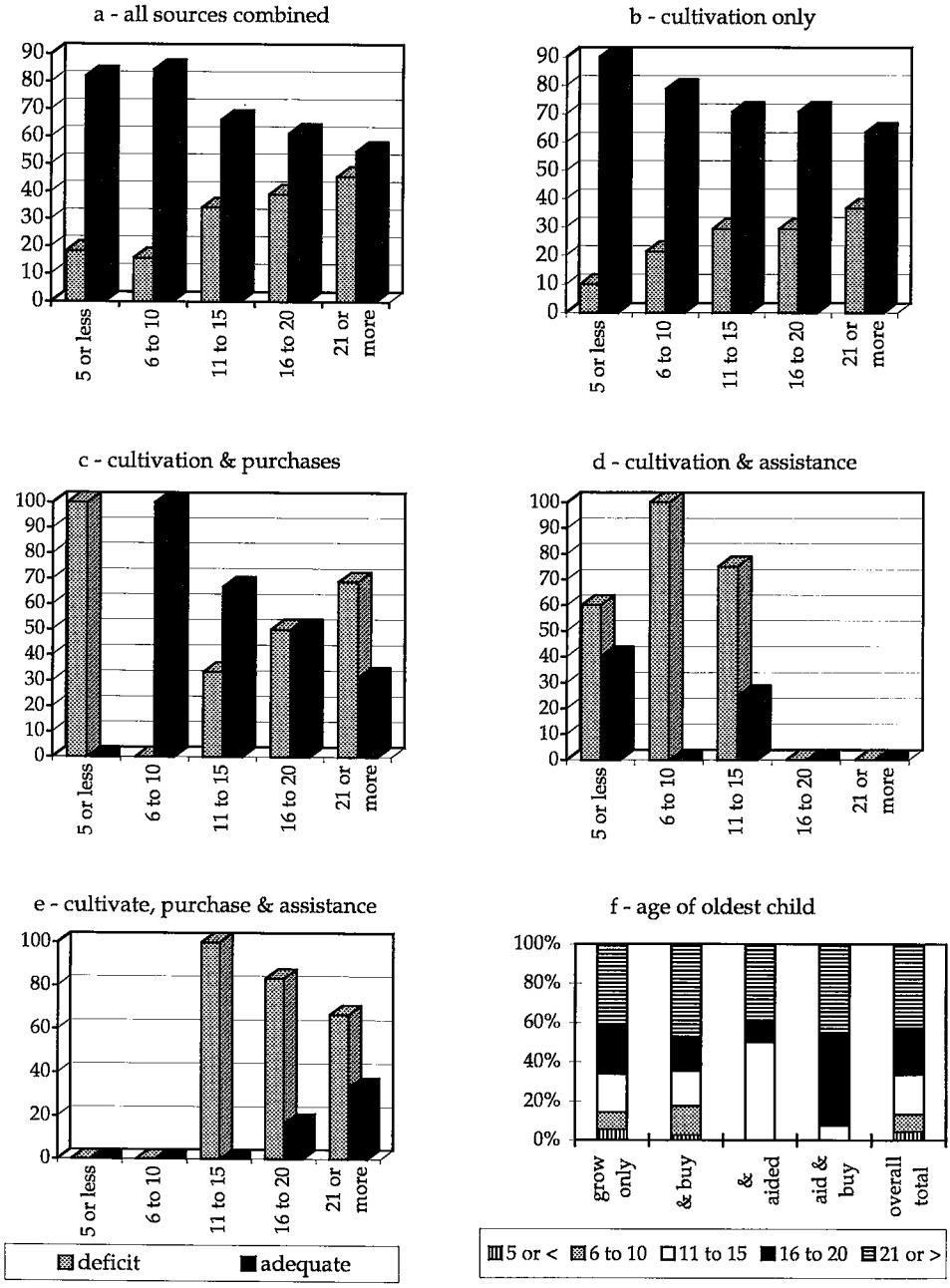


Figure 8.4 The relationship between age of oldest child and a household's food position
Source: Field Survey, 1995

In general, command over adequate supplies among households that depended on supplementing harvests with purchases, reduced with a rise in age, except for households with very young children (5 years or less).

There was little association between seeking assistance and age structure. For example, 40 percent of households with children aged five or less succeeded in meeting their food needs through combining cultivation with seeking assistance and this was 25 percent among those with children of 11 to 15 years. Furthermore, all households whose eldest child was aged 6 to 10 failed to obtain adequate food (Figure 8.4-d). The use of several strategies was more successful, although only marginally, among households with older children (Figure 8.4-e).

The question therefore is, how does life cycle influence ability to obtain adequate food and, how does this vary with the strategies that households employ? As already pointed out above, this is a function of the opportunities that people face, relative to the constraints. Nevertheless, because life chances are conceptualised variedly, some people continue to pursue their food needs through strategies that do not structurally fit their circumstances, but because it is the best option. Most households were in what could be described as the years of intense responsibility, their children were of school going age and most of them 16 years or older (Figure 8.4-f).

Land size

In Gusii oral narratives, land is portrayed as a source of livelihood, epitomising the community's well-being, and the relatively good soils had long been used to explain the Gusii's command over adequate food (Chapter 4). Couched in the paradigm that food security stems from supply, land has remained central to rural livelihoods in Kenya. It was little wonder then that among the early assignments of the Kenya government at independence was the need to make land available to those Africans who had been disinherited during colonial rule (Chapter 3). In this section, I look at the relationship between land size and ability to obtain adequate food.

As observed in Chapter 6, the amount of land available provided some households with the possibility of meeting their food needs in spite of low yields. A comparison between various land sizes and the food position of households suggests that there is a relationship between the amount of land available to these households and their ability to meet consumption needs.[6] For example, whereas about 50 percent of households with three acres of land or less obtained adequate supplies, this rose to 66 percent among those with 6 to 7 acres, and over 89 percent of households with 8 acres or more obtained adequate supplies (Figure 8.5-a).

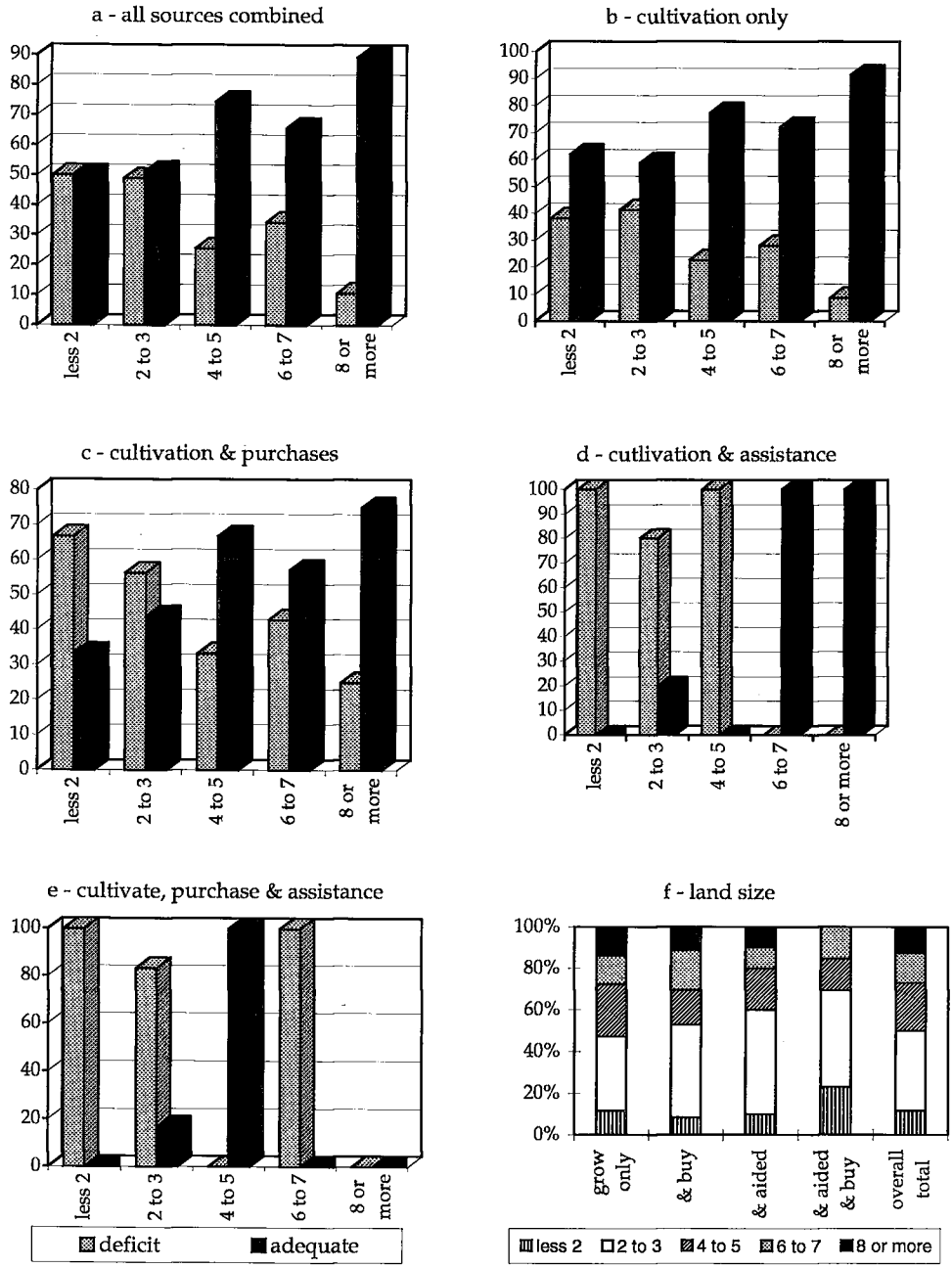


Figure 8.5 The relationship between land size and the food security position of households
Source: Field Survey, 1995

The ability to obtain adequate food even among households that were similarly endowed with land varied with how these households chose to organise the search for food. For example, among the households with a minimum of 8 acres of land, only 75 percent of those that sought their food needs through cultivation and purchasing managed to obtain adequate supplies, compared to over 90 percent among households that depended on cultivation only (Figure 8.5-b;c). Furthermore, all households that supplemented cultivation with seeking assistance among those with 8 acres or more succeeded in obtaining adequate food (Figure 8.5-d). However, all households with less than two acres of land and who combined cultivation with seeking assistance or seeking assistance with purchases failed to obtain adequate food (Figure 8.5-d;e). On the other hand, about 62 percent of households with less than 2 acres of land but who depended on cultivation only succeeded in obtaining adequate food (Figure 8.5-b). This was also the case for over 33 percent of households that supplemented cultivation with purchases (Figure 8.5-c).

Although limited access to land impacted on the food needs of all households, this was extreme among households that needed to supplement their harvests with seeking assistance or in combination with purchases (Figure 8.5-d;e). For example, whereas about 62 percent of households with less than 2 acres of land and who sought their food needs through cultivation only, succeeded (Figure 8.5-b), this was the case for only 33 percent of households that turned to purchasing (Figure 8.5-c). The rest of the households with less than 2 acres of land and who turned to seeking assistance or combined this with purchasing failed to obtain required food (Figure 8.5-d&e). But, while the proportion of households that managed to obtain required food generally increased with land size, this was not the case for all strategies.

In general, land endowment cut across all the food security strategies. However, most of the households with the least amount of land (less than two acres) sought their food needs through combining cultivation with purchases and assistance. On the other hand, most households with 8 acres of land or more depended on cultivation only. No one food security strategy was particularly dominant among households with 2 to 7 acres of land (Figure 8.5-f).

Land use

In general, command over adequate food depended on the amount of land that households allocated to maize cultivation, irrespective of whether they turned to supplementary sources or not. Whereas over 86 percent of households with 6 or more acres under maize met their food needs, 75 percent did so with 4 to 5 acres of maize. This reduced to 63 percent with 2 to 3 acres under maize and to 47 percent among those with less than 2 acres under maize.

However, underlying the relationship between land use and the food position at the household level is the assumption that in putting less land under food crops, households plan to meet their food needs on the market, through incomes earned from alternative land use. Indeed, out of the 240 households interviewed, a considerable number put land under finger millet (156), sorghum (156), coffee (180), tea (72) and pasture (190). However, although the proportion of food secure households among those with some of their land under various land uses was higher, several others failed to meet this need. While over 70 percent of households with land under tea obtained adequate food, this was the case for about 60 percent of those that did not have any tea crop. Similarly, whereas 60 percent of households with coffee were able to acquire adequate supplies, this was the case for over 70 percent of those who had no coffee (Figure 8.6-a). However, these variations were considerable within the various food security strategies that households employed. Alternative cropping served better the food needs of households that depended on cultivation or in combination with purchases (Figure 8.6-b;c), as compared to those of households that supplemented their harvests with seeking assistance or in combination with purchases (Figure 8.6-d;e).

These land use patterns suggest that households that grow their own food are relatively better off than those that may choose to put their land into other uses, with the intention of obtaining food on the market. In Chapter 1 it was indicated that the food (maize) market is volatile. We also saw in Chapter 7 that the decision to meet food needs on the market is subject to what else needs to be done with the same money. More than this is the fact that returns to most farm activities are low, and the decision on how to utilise such money is more intricate than the obvious need to balance food demand with supply.

But, putting land under other food crops such as finger millet and sorghum did not grant these households a greater advantage, than that enjoyed by some of those that depended on conventional export crops (Figure 8.6-a). This is because, although widely cultivated, both finger millet and sorghum occupy a comparatively little amount of land. Furthermore, because finger millet is often in high demand in the preparation of local beer (*ememera*), its role as an alternative source of staple food is reduced (cf Chapter 7).

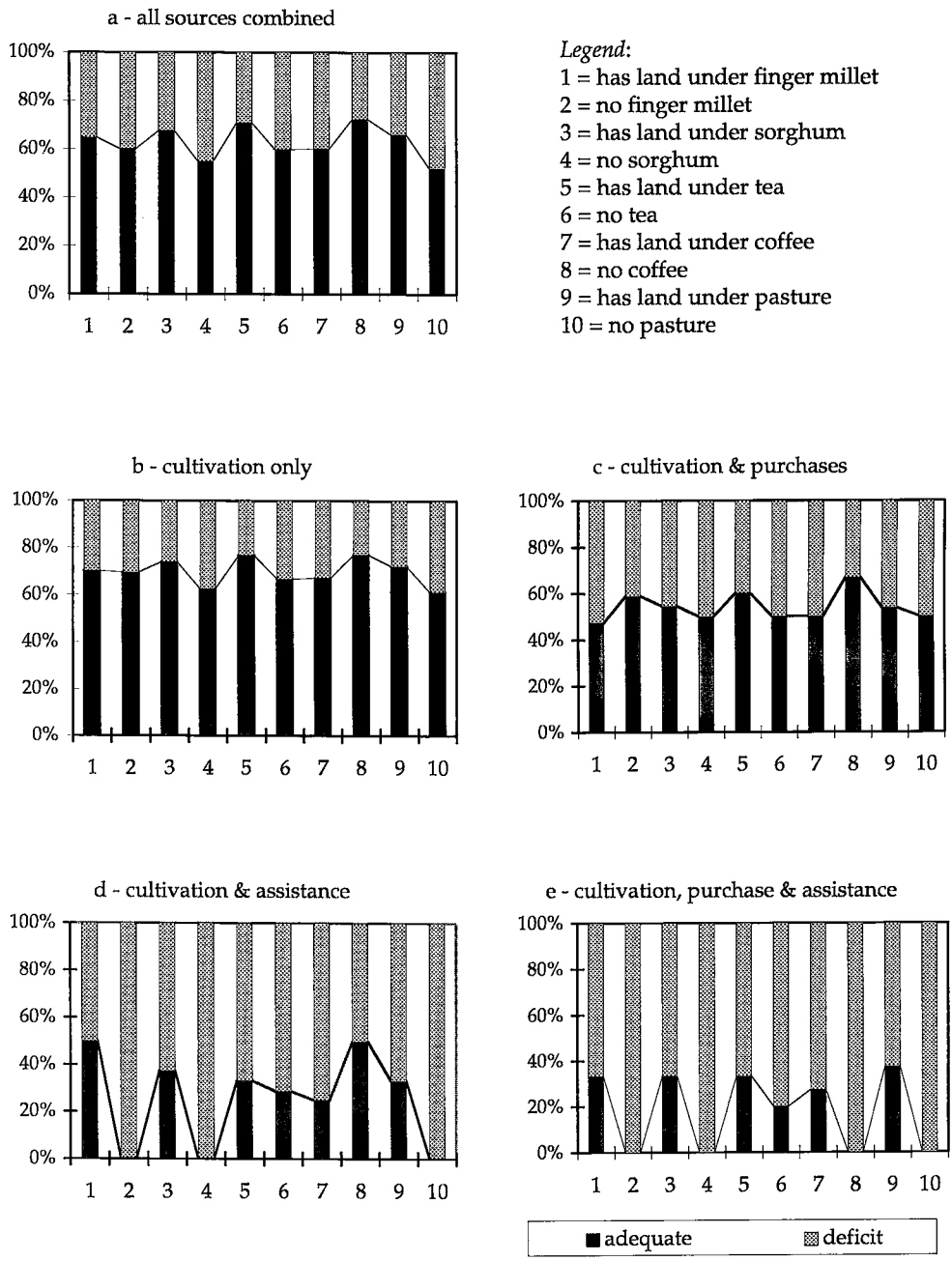


Figure 8.6 Relationship between land use and the food position of households
Source: Field Survey, 1995

Management of food supplies

In Chapter 5, we saw that just as households employed a variety of strategies during their search for food, once secured, this food was also variedly managed. Some households sent some of their harvest to relatives and friends, while others sold to purchase other necessities. In addition, consumption levels differed from house to house. In general, households that required relatively less to balance their supply with demand were successful in obtaining adequate food. For example, 97 percent of those that required five bags of maize or less were able to balance their supply with demand as compared to only 66 percent among households that required 6 to 10 bags, and 38 percent among those that needed 11 to 15 bags of maize. Only about 6 percent of households that required 21 bags or more managed to meet their food demand.

The ability of households to command adequate supplies relative to their consumption needs, varied with the source of this food. Among households that required only between one and five bags of maize, most met demand through maize cultivation only. However, a considerable proportion of households that required 6 to 10 bags of maize failed to obtain adequate supplies, irrespective of the strategy that they had employed. For example, 60 percent of households that required 6 to 10 bags and who sought their food needs either through cultivation or in combination with purchasing succeeded and this was 33 and 43 percent among households that turned to seeking assistance or in combination with purchases, respectively. Only 12 percent of households that required 16 bags of maize or more, and who turned to other sources for additional supplies, met their food needs. Therefore, while consumption needs have an influence on who is likely to succeed in obtaining adequate food, this also depends on how households seek to procure this food. And, as pointed out earlier, command over adequate food is higher among those that require less.

As already stated above, stocks at hand could reduce if households sold or if they engaged in giving out assistance. However, while nobody blamed shortfalls arising from harvests on the possibility that such households may have given out more than they could spare,[7] there was a widespread belief that most households that did not have enough to eat, in spite of good harvests, had engaged in selling what was obviously not a surplus. The general perception was that households that sold what they themselves needed were irresponsible, ignorant of market conditions, illiterate, drunkards, poor planners, desirous of luxuries, stupid or lazy. But there was also compassion shown to people that sold, only to run out of food. They were seen as persons in need of money for school fees, who were faced with unforeseen problems, or less fortunate or generally with no alternative but to sell. Some were rightly perceived as persons with another source of income, often salaried employment or cash crops and were therefore able to purchase should the need arise.

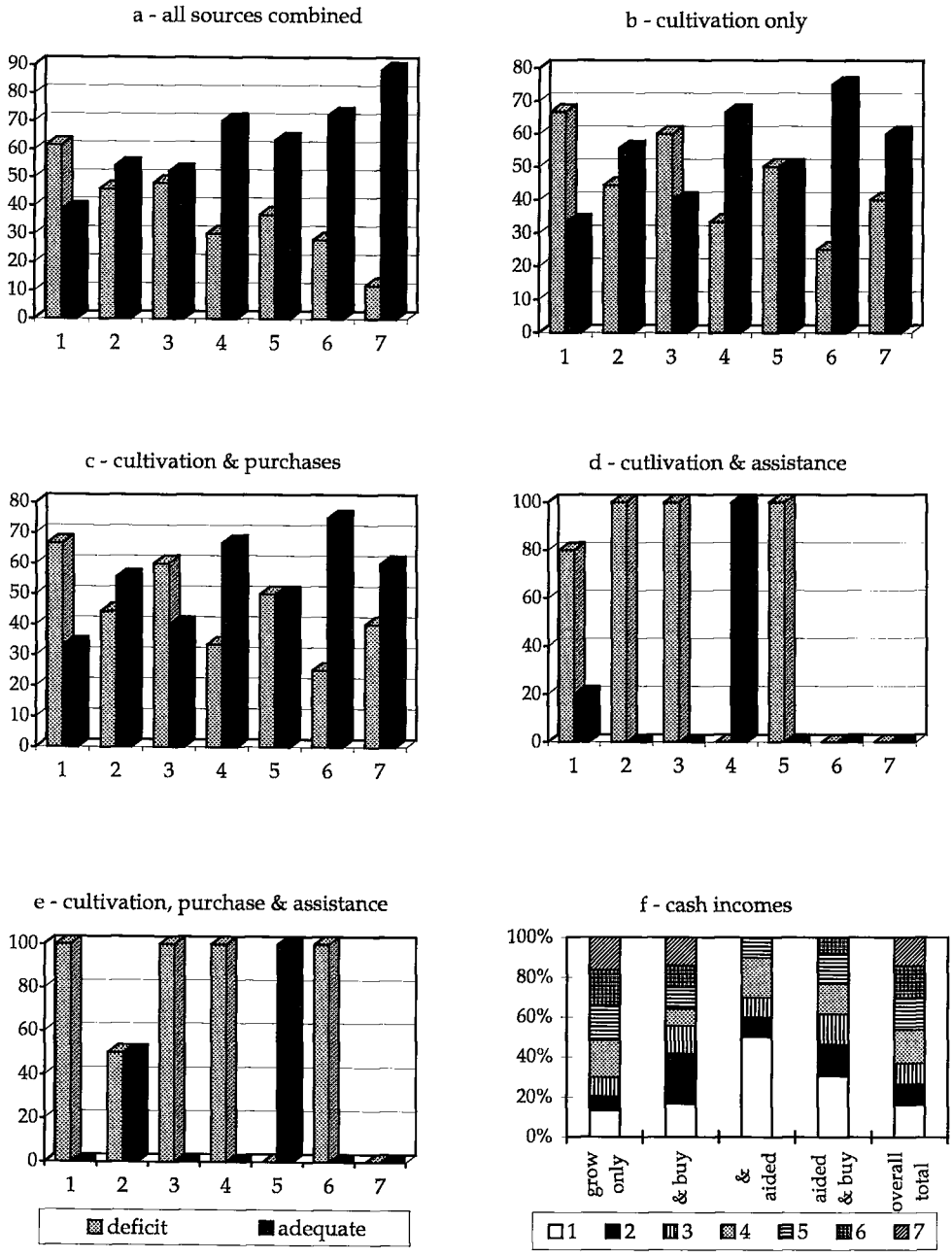
In spite of the many misgivings about selling staple food, 131 of the 240 households interviewed still took maize (millet and sorghum) to the market. The amount of maize sold in 1995 constituted about one fifth (19%) of total production and almost one quarter

(24%) of total consumption. An average of five bags of maize was sold and about one third of the households sold above this. Considering that production averaged only 13 bags, the proportion of maize sold is considerable. There was little variation in sales between the long and short rains crop, a further indication that selling is a regular practice. Indeed, over 76 percent of the households that had engaged in selling maize sold whenever the need arose. The rest sold every market day (12%) or at one go upon a new harvest (12%). However, the food position of those who had not engaged in selling part of their harvest was no better than that of those that sold. Of 106 households that sold maize in 1995, only 15 of them failed to balance their food supply with demand. On the other hand, over 55 percent of the 130 households that did not engage in the sale of maize in 1995 failed to obtain adequate food.

Income levels

In the study area, whereas close to 70 percent of the adult men (n=155) and over 93 percent of the women (n=85) were engaged mainly in farming, less than two thirds of the entire population derived a cash income from maize (45%), tea (23%), coffee (31%) or livestock (40%). About 56 percent of the households had access to an off-farm income, which ranged from as little as Kshs. 400 a year to as much as Kshs. 180,000. This money mainly came from salaried employment (24%), an assortment of business ventures (15%) and remittances, primarily from children and parents (61%).[8]

Generally, commanding markets is really about ability to pay, either by directly purchasing required food or through acquiring the inputs necessary to make cultivation possible. However, while more households among the relatively high income earners were able to obtain adequate food, this was punctuated with 'unexpected' fluctuations. Hence, although less than 39 percent of households with the lowest annual income were able to obtain adequate food, as compared to over 54 percent among households with almost twice this income, this upward movement was not always guaranteed. For example, only 52 percent of households with an income of between Kshs. 3,000 and 5,000 obtained adequate supplies, and, although this rose to 70 percent among those with incomes of Kshs. 5,000 to 10,000, this proportion dropped to 63 percent among households with incomes of over 10,000. Hence, some households failed to obtain adequate food irrespective of the amount of income they received (Figure 8.7-a).



Legend: **1**=1,000 or less;**2**=1,001 - 3,000;**3**=3,001 - 5,000;**4**=5,001 - 10,000; **5**=10,001 - 20,000;**6**=20,001 - 40,000;**7**= 40,001+

Figure 8.7 A comparison between annual incomes (Kshs) and the food position of households. Source: Field Survey, 1995

Indeed, although command over adequate supplies varied with income levels among households that sought their food needs through cultivation or in combination with purchases, the differences were not distinct (Figure 8.7-b;c). All households with an annual income of Kshs. 10,000 and above, and who supplemented cultivation with seeking assistance or in combination with purchases, failed to obtained adequate supplies (Figure 8.7-d;e). The question therefore is: Why did some households fail to obtain adequate food while they had a cash income? Secondly, why did households with 'access' to about the same amount of cash income experience different commands over required food? In Chapter 7, it was demonstrated that purchasing what could be grown at home remains undesirable because of the several needs that require to be attended to using the same limited resources. I will address this issue farther, in the context of households that turned to the market for additional food supplies.

About 73 percent of the households that turned to the market in 1995 described themselves as farmers. Fifty percent of them had some land under coffee and close to one fifth (19%) had some tea. However, earnings from both crops were meagre. In 1995, these households earned an average of Kshs. 6,810 from tea and Kshs. 2,360 from coffee. Furthermore, although about 33 percent of the households reared some livestock, this earned them an average of less than one thousand shillings a year. And although over 53 percent of these households reported selling farm produce on regular market days, most of them received less than one hundred shillings in return, an amount that would not even buy two kilogrammes of sugar.

Consequently, although every household reported having had access to some cash income, much of it was meagre, irregular and unpredictable (Figure 8.7-f). For example, only 27 percent of the households had a spouse engaged in off-farm work and, except for the few that were in teaching, the rest of the jobs were of low pay. In fact, 22 percent of households that had the opportunity to earn an off-farm income failed to secure food needs on the market. This was 56 percent for households that did not have access to off-farm income. Furthermore, 50 percent of households that received remittances failed to acquire shortfalls on the market.

Instead, success in commanding markets seemed to depend on whether households turned to purchasing food out of a planned choice or because they had to. For example, all households that had obtained surpluses at harvest but nevertheless turned to purchasing for various reasons managed to obtain adequate supplies, while only about one half (55%) of those with shortfalls ranging between 60 and 90 percent of their demand were able to meet their food needs through purchases. And, surprisingly, all households with relatively minor shortfalls, ranging between 15 and 59 percent of their required consumption, did not obtain adequate supplies, in spite of having turned to purchasing.

The challenges facing purchasing as a source of food, however, are not always visible. Part of the paradox of rural life is that some of the classical indicators of differences in wealth and socio-economic status co-exist. For instance, some of the households that failed to obtain adequate food lived in stone houses (2%) and the majority lived in

houses that were roofed with corrugated iron sheets (75%). Only 23 percent of these households were in grass thatched houses. This situation was similar among households that nevertheless obtained adequate food. Only a few of them lived in a stone house (8%) while the majority (73%) had houses that were roofed with corrugated iron-sheets and a considerable proportion (19%) lived in grass thatched houses. Indeed, the fact that Kerubo and her husband (Chapter 7) decided to spend most of his pension in putting up a *mabati* roofed house instead of investing in an area that was more likely to improve their command over existing sources of food, brings out the complexities that continue to surround the search for adequate food among rural households.

Commanding adequate food

Among the Gusii, a food secure person is perceived as one who is able to obtain a sufficient farm output, has enough land and off-farm income, undertakes recommended husbandry practices, has educated children, and is hard working, healthy, peaceful, wise and organised (Field Interviews, 1995-1997). Hence, obtaining required food supplies is viewed in terms of resource endowment, mainly land, cash income, individual skill, and networks. However, the foregoing discussion on what differentiates households that are able to command adequate food from those that fail to obtain sufficient supplies shows that, whereas this varies with household size, family life cycle, amount of land under maize cultivation, quantity of food harvested and how food supplies are managed, some of the households that seem to 'fulfil' these requirements nevertheless fail to obtain required food, a direct challenge to conventional assumptions (cf World Bank 1988, p.3). This section aims then, with the use of the case studies discussed in Chapters 5, 6, and 7, to explain this complexity by bringing out some of the social dynamics that tend to regulate who actually gets to command adequate supplies. I focus mainly on what else regulates command over obtaining adequate food - through cultivation, purchasing and/or seeking assistance.

Although it has been observed that smaller households enjoyed a better command over meeting their food needs (Figure 8.2), it is also evident that some of the households that managed to obtain adequate food were large. Looking at the specifics of households that had a relatively high demand but could not obtain adequate supplies, suggests that there is more to this association than their numbers and consequent consumption. For instance, why was Chris able to successfully obtain additional food while both Bathseba and Kerubo could not? Much as these three households consisted of nine people, Chris had access to a regular cash income, mainly from the sale of milk, unlike both Bathseba and Kerubo. Although Bathseba had children in employment, they were already taking care of their younger siblings and, while she had both coffee and tea, earnings from these crops went directly to her husband. And, as we saw in Chapter 5, while her recourse to purchasing staple food aimed at resisting her husband's control over family income, total reliance on markets did not enable Bathseba

to obtain her food needs fully. On the other hand, Kerubo did not have a cash crop and, although her husband was in salaried employment (until January 1997) and she complained that he did not support her, we must also realise that his earnings as a tea picker were meagre. He was paying school fees for their son then in secondary school and he also lived with some of their children. Back home, Kerubo had a job but this was only as a casual labourer, earning twenty shillings per day worked, about half the cost of a tiny tin of maize grain (*omotoriro*), an amount that would be equivalent to only about one meal in her household.

Similarly, although both Yobensiah and Sabina each had seven people to feed, their husbands were employed off-farm, and they had some land under tea and coffee, only Sabina managed to obtain adequate food supplies in 1995. Underlying Sabina's command over adequate food is the fact that she was able to put a considerable amount of land under maize and although she faced a shortfall after selling and giving out some of her harvest, she was able to balance her food demand with supply through seeking assistance because the amount required was only minor. On the other hand, Yobensiah failed to obtain sufficient food although she turned to both purchasing and seeking assistance because her shortfall at harvest was much higher. In 1995, she harvested only nine bags of maize while she required more than twice this amount, as compared to Sabina who had realised a surplus amounting to about three times her consumption needs. Furthermore, Sabina's husband had a better paying job compared to Yobensiah, although the former had never resorted to purchasing food.

Hence, although it has been observed that household characteristics contribute to ability to command required food, and relatively young and/or resource endowed households are more successful in obtaining adequate food (Figures 8.3; 8.4; 8.5; 8.6; 8.7), this largely depends on what else is going on in the specific households. While both Sarah's and Yobensiah's husbands were 48 years old and in employment, and the eldest child in each of these households was in their twenties, only Sarah's household managed to obtain adequate food. Unlike Yobensiah and in spite of having almost twice as many people to support, Sarah's harvest was about one and a half times more than she required, and she had access to about three times Yobensiah's amount of land. Furthermore, some of Sarah's children were in salaried employment while the only one of Yobensiah's children that was through with his education was unemployed. Therefore, whereas Sarah did not enjoy any access to her husband's income as did Yobensiah, she was still able to command adequate food through cultivation while Yobensiah could not balance her food needs despite resorting to several sources. This is partly because Yobensiah, unlike Sarah, participated directly in the education of her children, while this was the sole responsibility of Sarah's husband. Besides, Sarah's husband had a better paying job compared to Yobensiah's. Nevertheless, although Kerubo had an employed son, she was not able to enjoy remittances like Sarah. Her son was only a security guard and, since he was married, his meagre earnings were not sufficient to enable him to render support to his mother.

Therefore, is command over adequate food predictable? That is, are we in a position to know who is likely to have access to adequate supplies the next time around? In discussing how some succeed while others fail during the search for adequate food, we have seen that this varies, although not absolutely, with what else is going on within and beyond these households. But, whereas it has been possible to 'capture' some of the factors that tend to influence command over adequate food, it is also clear that this is highly variable, and much of it depends on how life unfolds more generally. For instance, while household characteristics could change with the passage of time, this will not necessarily occasion similar changes to the food needs of each of the households undergoing these changes. For some of them, an aging household will bring about better networks in terms of employed children whereas for others, this will mark the beginning of their inability to command adequate food, following an increase in the number of dependants or, retirement from active life and loss of income.

This process is even more complicated when it comes to resource use. In Chapter 5 we saw that while some households were able to increase their land holdings and this enhanced their food needs, these benefits were not guaranteed. For instance, just at the point of increasing their land holdings, some of the men took a second wife and this reduced whatever possibilities that may have been created. On the other hand, some investments were thwarted by processes that were beyond the people's immediate control, such as the fall in coffee prices and fluctuations in currency exchange rates. Hence, some of the macro level changes that could be assumed to be removed from the everyday lives of rural households actually impact on how these households operate and, as such, ability to command adequate food comes to also depend on how events in far away places evolve.

Food security clustering, a lifeworld

At national level, choosing a food security strategy is a matter of national concern. This is because it touches on sovereignty, distribution and use of scarce resources, and governance (Chapter 3). Although one would want to assume therefore that what matters most, at the household level, is the need to make food available, there are strong indications that people go for those strategies that appeal to their perceived reality (Chapters 5, 6 & 7). This chapter has looked at what regulates performance when households engage in exchanging with nature, or with others, or while receiving transfers. The foregoing discussion has demonstrated that the performance of each of the strategies employed to meet food needs varies with household composition, resource endowment and cash incomes, and how these food supplies are subsequently managed. In general, the use of multiple sources of food is more favourable with smaller households, while larger ones tend to benefit more from growing their own food. In addition, younger households enjoy a higher command over meeting food needs, except when this involves seeking assistance. Moreover, resource endowment

has no direct relationship with the ability to obtain adequate food, except for households that allocate a considerable amount of land to maize cultivation; and, generally, overall success in meeting food needs depends on how much is harvested and the gap that needs to be filled with supplies from elsewhere.

Hence, the outcome at the exchange mapping level depends on much more than a household's ownership bundle. Instead, whether or not a given ownership bundle translates into adequate food depends on how the actors perceive and thereafter problematise their situation and on unexpected and uncontrollable outcomes. Therefore, the food security clustering that we have observed represents a lifeworld that depends on how those concerned interpret and predict the reality around them, the experiences they bring to bear, and the norms that bind them to the choices they make. Consequently, households that pursue similar strategies possess varied control over them, and even when this control is seemingly similar or guaranteed, households arrive at different levels of success.

What then constitutes food security? The foregoing chapters have indicated that food security is multi-faceted. While it entails ability to command an adequate source of food, there are variations regarding when this command can be said to have been successfully attained. I have, therefore, argued that over and above the quantities that may be obtained, food security could still remain unattained if households have insufficient/little and/or unpredictable command over any source or a combination of existing sources, or if this command is gained at the expense of other equally compelling needs. In Chapter 9, by way of conclusion, I revisit some of these issues.

Notes

1. In Chapter 7 I looked at some of the options that households faced once they failed to balance food demand with supplies from cultivation, purchasing and seeking assistance. As indicated, most of these measures are inadequate. At this level, therefore, such households experience hidden hunger, much of it in the form of under-nutrition.

2. This ability is therefore conceptualised as managing to obtain adequate supplies (physical stocks) and the mental disposition it takes to consider a given strategy as manageable.

3. This largely refers to the strategies that households employ to obtain food: through cultivation (production-based entitlement), by purchasing (trade-based entitlement), through receiving assistance (transfer-based entitlement), or a combination of two or more of these. See Chapter 5 for details.

4. Some of the clusters used in these cross-tabulations consist of very few cases. These results are therefore used to bring out emerging patterns rather than for their statistical significance. In addition to these cross-tabulations, I draw on the experiences of the case studies already presented in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. In this Chapter, these cases have also been categorised into two: those that obtained adequate supplies and those that experienced deficits. In 1995,

Yobensiah, Kerubo and Bathseba were not able to balance supply with demand, while Sarah, Josephine, Sabina, Chris and Nyaboke managed to do so. I wish to note here, as already pointed out elsewhere in this work, that these food security positions are far from being a permanent feature of any one household.

5. I have used the age of the oldest child so as to bring out the opportunities and constraints that these households are likely to face as they organise their food needs. This is not obvious from the age distribution of the youngest child in each household.

6. In seeking to see whether there is a relationship between land ownership and meeting food needs, I make the assumption that households put their land into some use, including growing their own food or, deriving income from the sale of farm produce, which could then go into purchasing required food.

7. There was little variation between the food position of households that gave out assistance and those that did not. Instead, while about 32 percent of households that did not give out assistance in 1995 failed to obtain adequate supplies, this was the case for only 21 percent of those that had given out part of their food harvest. Furthermore, over 56 percent of households that had never participated in giving or seeking assistance did not obtain adequate food during the same year. The latter suggests that non-participation may have made their food position even more vulnerable, an observation that has also been alluded to by Adams (1993, p.48).

8. Income here refers to earnings in cash and therefore excludes farm produce that is consumed directly, and benefits that are received in kind.

CHAPTER 9

RE-CONCEPTUALISING FOOD SECURITY: MEANINGS AND PRACTICES

In the foregoing chapters, we have seen that the meanings that households attach to food security pervade the strategies they use to secure food. In other words, the strategies that are devised and directed towards obtaining food are a function of how food security is perceived. Therefore, though three main sources of food were identifiable (namely cultivation, markets and social safety nets), households employed a diversity of approaches while utilising any one of these sources. While some continued to utilise land cultivation as the sole source of food, the majority combined this with purchasing and/or seeking assistance. Hence, although the importance of cultivation as a source of food tended to dominate people's opinions, this was not always supported by what households actually did. Furthermore, whereas success in being food secure was not guaranteed through anyone technique, some strategies performed better than others.

I have therefore argued that food security is the ability to command an adequate amount of food. However, over and above the actual quantities of food accessed, food security may remain unattained if those in need do not gain sufficient and/or predictable command over any one or a combination of existing food sources, or if this command is gained at the expense of other basic needs. Hence, while there is a general consensus about major sources of food, there is disparity in terms of when one can be said to have gained command, how this command is gained and what actually counts as adequate command. I have therefore argued that obtaining adequate food goes beyond one's endowment or the exchange mappings facing this endowment to include, how the individuals concerned interact with the processes leading to gaining these endowments and further to this, how the entitlement relations that govern access to required food are managed. Therefore, searching for adequate food is a social process and, contrary to assumptions within commoditisation theories and the entitlements approach (Chapter 2), obtaining adequate food is shrouded in constant negotiations and trade-offs.

In this concluding chapter, I pull together the various ways in which food security is conceptualised and practised at the rural household level. I mainly focus on how the concept has changed over the years, what remains real in the meanings accorded to the search for food, and what has ceased to be. By separating what is real and practised from what is imagined but nevertheless important, I highlight how the search for adequate food is the outcome of a constantly negotiated process. I also venture into making propositions regarding who is likely to continue enjoying food security status and who could possibly become vulnerable.

The search for food security: images and realities

In seeking to understand how food security comes about, and only for some, this study has looked at the processes taking place and those that have already taken place, both at the micro and macro levels. I have argued that the search for adequate food is multi-faceted and success depends on how individual households interweave their experiences, and how life chances unfold more generally. Although these day-to-day undertakings by households seem like individual endeavour, they are embedded within a larger livelihood and it is here that these strategies are shaped and re-shaped. However, in the process, some practices transform into images of the reality which continue to contribute to how the search for adequate food evolves.

In this section, I highlight some of the images and realities that permeate food security, both as a concept and a practice. I synthesise what households currently do with what they say they do and the changes that have taken place over time. I mainly focus on how these households conceptualise their search for food and whether in fact this compares with the strategies that they actually engage in, during this search, and how this then comes to impact on their overall food security position.

Searching for a sufficient harvest

Growing one's own food constitutes, according to Sen, a production-based entitlement (Sen 1981, p.2). This, he argues, derives from the right to own what one grows on the farm. We have, however, seen in Chapters 4 and 6 that people engage in food production for more reasons than subsistence. Besides, ownership of what one grows is not as overriding a concern, if at all, as the need to command sufficient resources necessary to grow this food. Moreover, a food harvest, however good, comprises more than available supplies for consumption. The Case Studies in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 show that households have to meet several other obligations on account of what they harvest, to the extent that 'future' food needs are forfeited for more 'immediate' non-food concerns. This study therefore argues that the search for adequate food can only be located in specific lifeworlds and this varies from one case to another and over time. These lifeworlds are subject to influence from both external and internal sources, and the outcome depends on how the individuals concerned manage this process. I will illustrate this with the following account on what remains 'real' regarding cultivation as a source of food.

Prior to the period when the Gusii moved from being subsistence farmers growing finger millet for home consumption to producing for the market, food surpluses were exchanged for necessities, such as livestock and farm implements. Then, only surpluses were marketed, initially in exchange for valued goods from other Gusii clans or the Luo and other neighbouring communities, and later on for cash from European and Indian traders. Adequate food derived from having access to land and labour. And, before

posho mills became available and widespread, maize was mainly grown for the market while finger millet was cultivated as the staple crop for home consumption. Soon, finger millet receded into secondary status and adequate food came to be synonymous with maize cultivation. Although maize too started facing competition from conventional cash crops such as coffee and tea, people continued to view their food needs in terms of ability to enjoy a surplus production. Adequate food is now largely equated with self-sufficiency in maize production. And contrary to the policy expectation that households will put their (scarce) resources where they enjoy a comparative advantage, land use reflects a struggle to combine food production with several cropping patterns, and irrespective of the kind of opportunities provided for by available sizes. Nevertheless, food cultivation, once a way of life, as described in Chapter 4, is now one among many 'projects' that rural households undertake. And, cumulatively, cultivation is no longer the main or only source of staple food for the majority of the Gusii, in spite of the fact that most people continue to measure their food security from this point of view.

Furthermore, because of the need to obtain other basic needs, households engage in practices that seem to work against their goal of food self-sufficiency. They sell their food harvest irrespective of future needs while they give out assistance even when it is clear that they have nothing to spare. To these people, therefore, the search for adequate food stands for an ongoing everyday activity and negotiation whereby challenges are faced as they evolve and opportunities are taken up as they unfold.

Reaching markets

Proponents of the market view it as the ultimate solution to eliminating hunger. In pursuit of this, results that point to the contrary are attributed to a failure to take advantage of benefits accruing from market relations (Chapter 2). However, in addition to the existence of information that clearly positions the role of markets on the contrary, the practicalities at the rural household level operate within a desire to avoid markets and an obvious need for them (Chapters 5 & 7). And, although most households in Kitutu Chache turn to markets from time to time for additional food supplies, the quantities of food obtained are meagre and the decision to purchase is taken only as a last resort.

Nevertheless, the role of markets as a source of food has increased over the years. As shown in Chapter 4, prior to the 1910s, the Gusii sought markets mostly for purposes of obtaining what they could not produce, mainly farm implements. Association with markets however intensified after the Gusii territory was brought under British rule. But, even at this point, the Gusii for the most part saw and used markets as an outlet for their surplus produce and therefore, as a source of cash income. But, this changed rapidly following policies that favoured production for export and industry. Currently, as is clear from Chapter 7, engaging in the purchase of staple food is a matter of how life chances unfold.

Therefore, while purchasing is viewed by the Gusii as an early sign of food insecurity, in reality, movement towards markets as a source of food is also increasingly seen as being in a position to handle food shortfalls. Apart from the view that those who 'feed from the market' are poor planners, people also perceived them as town dwellers - a local synonym for access to regular cash income, among other assumptions. The Gusii nonetheless continue to differentiate between being pushed into markets (*ogotonda*) and turning to them out of choice (*okogora*). What then seems to count (most) in this differentiation is having a source of income that is also steady and sufficient, and therefore the absence of competing demands for the same resources as would be required to purchase food. In the event that there is such a competition, purchasing food remains to be *ogotonda* which then continues to take a lower priority over other needs, such as paying for children's education or purchasing farm inputs for the next season. The fact that markets remain un-affordable has therefore continued to reinforce the image as held among most Gusii that engaging in the purchase of staple food is already an early sign of food insecurity. Indeed, some of the households that engaged in purchasing a portion of their food were relatively less able financially, compared to a number of those that have continued to avoid markets.

Despite persuasive arguments within Sen's trade-based entitlements, this study's empirical data demonstrates that to 'exchange with others' involves much more than the potential to purchase (Chapters 5 & 7). Getting to buy food also depends on how markets are perceived relative to other possible avenues. Among the Gusii, while markets may be tolerated and applied, there is a continued tendency to prefer to stay away from purchasing staple food. This is, however, not without ambiguity. For instance, how people conduct their day-to-day activities, including 'non-commoditised' relations, is influenced by market principles. Indeed, one of the reasons why little food is now given out as assistance is a result of some 'opportunity cost' principle - this food can fetch much needed money on the market. But, in so doing, households also fear being isolated for seeming 'insensitive' to the needs of their kin. To a large extent, therefore, the role of markets in the search for adequate food is an opportunity, a risk and a necessity, depending on who is enroling markets, when and how.

Counting on others

The general existence of social safety nets enables benefactors and beneficiaries alike to enjoy a sense of security, so long as they are able to count on the existence of such an option. But, benefactors do not give in spite of their needs. There are specific guidelines as to what is to be expected of those seeking assistance and the obligation of a potential benefactor. The reduction in the quantity of food given out as assistance suggests that households do exercise some caution, which, however, remains concealed. Therefore, the possibility of receiving assistance cannot be exaggerated. And, while participation in giving assistance remains mutual, those that give out cannot always count on their

beneficiaries, should the need arise. It is then not uncommon to find that at the moment that households need food assistance, these beneficiaries are in no position to 'return the favour'.

In Chapters 5 and 7, it is also argued that social safety nets are among the most resilient forms of social networks. Emerging changes include the fact that some of the people that give out food assistance are not necessarily returning a similar favour, and neither are they investing in the possibility that they too might need such assistance. Instead, giving food aid now fulfils needs other than simply food-related ones. Some people hand out food assistance in exchange for a different form of assistance, recognition or as a way to exercise authority. This, however, means that the right to receive food assistance, conceptualised by Sen as a transfer-based entitlement, cannot be taken for granted. And, while this 'responsibility' may now be assumed to lie with national governments, this has been largely neglected by them.

What constitutes food security at the rural household level

Discussions throughout this thesis demonstrate that to be or not to be food secure within this context ranges from holding food reserves to the mere fact that some household members or networks are assumed to have the potential to render food assistance when such a need arises. And, in addition to a realisation that the search for food is diversely executed, it is also apparent that what constitutes adequate food is not obvious. Different people feel food secure (or insecure) for very different reasons. In other words, attaining food security is an outcome of how the individuals concerned interact with, and how they interpret, existing opportunities and constraints.

The question therefore is: What constitutes food security and when can it be said to have been attained? In this section, I synthesise observations that have emerged throughout this study regarding what entails food security among rural households in Kisii District, Kenya.

In Chapter 4, I described how the search for food was organised in customary Gusii, and when the people felt food secure. It is observed that then, working towards meeting food needs was a way of life and this anchored around the ability to grow this food. Land and labour were the primary requirements and access to them was clearly defined. Hence, although adequate food was equated with a surplus harvest, this is a process that began much earlier with the acquisition of fields for cultivation and the labour to undertake the work. This also entailed the ability to acquire farm implements and this depended on having food surpluses with which to exchange for these items. During this period, adequate food specifically referred to finger millet and movement towards seeking assistance was seen as a sign of food insecurity, although in practical terms this enabled those in need to obtain required food.

Yet, this does not mean that access to land and labour guaranteed adequate food. The Gusii were afflicted with several famines. In spite of access to about the same

opportunities, people stored differently and their food needs were also diverse. And, in severe circumstances, the social insurance mechanisms failed to operate. Furthermore, as the Gusii interacted with both internal and external processes of change, views on what constituted adequate food shifted.

Hence, some of the practices that were earlier on seen as signs of food insecurity have come to form part of the strategies regularly employed by households. In Chapter 5, it was observed that seeking assistance is utilised from time to time and purchasing food is a regular phenomenon. Therefore, in addition to land and labour, adequate food has come to include a cash income and continually being in social networks. And even more decisive is how these sources of food are managed. As such, whereas households aim at maximising resource use, their actual food position depends on how these resources are organised. And, as explored in Chapter 8, while obtaining adequate food entails having a sufficient and predictable command over sources of food, and this generally varies with household composition, resource endowment, cash incomes and how acquired supplies are managed, these relationships are interlaced with what else is going on in people's lives.

Consequently, as observed in Chapters 6 and 7, food security has come to stand for the ability to juggle opportunities. Households facing an imminent food shortage will nevertheless go ahead and spend whatever money that there is in attending to concerns that they consider much more immediate than obtaining food, while those with sufficient food will sell available stocks to generate cash money for similar reasons. Although such households will ordinarily explain their actions with reference to views such as impending hunger remains within *'God will provide'* , the underlying wisdom is that by postponing one problem, they can generate *breathing space.*

Therefore, food security goes beyond the entitlement relations as postulated by Amartya Sen. It anchors on how individual households organise resources (endowments), how they blend their experiences with the reality around them, and how they interact with the external circumstances - all of which come to constitute part of their opportunities and challenges. Hence, whereas gaining command over a source of food is important, the more decisive factor is how this command is mobilised and effected. As such, food security alludes to that which is tangible as well as the intangible. It is about preserving a livelihood and this includes, among others, nourishment, self-esteem and identity.

The food policy revisited

In Chapter 3 we saw that Kenya's food policy aims at ensuring that there is an 'adequate supply of nutritionally balanced foods in all parts of the country, at all times' (Republic of Kenya SP No.2 1994, p.24). In pursuit of this goal, government policy strives at measures that could result in increased production and productivity, and an effective marketing and distribution system. In addition to the ruptures and discrepancies

already highlighted in Chapter 3, discussions throughout this thesis further suggest that what the food policy has put in place may not, at least on its own, enable rural households to obtain adequate food. Hence, what challenges do the meanings accorded to food security at the rural household level pose to the country's food policy?

Though the conceptualisation of food security among rural households is a result of how these households interact with unfolding life chances, to a large extent, these households do not, in principle, perceive food security differently from what would be desirable at the policy level. They too aspire to have an adequate supply of nutritionally balanced food, *at all times*, and this they perceive in terms of having a 'full granary' (mainly stocks from their own harvests). And, like the policy at national level that desires to avoid food imports, rural households too envision a life where they do not have to acquire their staple food using cash incomes that are already too scarce.

However, most of the strategies that policies stipulate remain only a mirage for rural households. Although these households depend on cultivation for much of their staple food, this has not permitted many of them access to adequate food. And, while this has been attributed to a failure, on their part, to engage in modern farm practices, this only tends to ignore the realities of rural livelihoods. Recommended farm inputs are costly to acquire and there is little 'incentive' to invest money, that is so badly needed in other areas, on subsistence production. Furthermore, the alternative of putting land to other uses, which is assumed to be a matter of comparative advantage, is not obvious. As indicated in Chapter 4, cash returns from conventional cash crops such as coffee have become meagre. Rural households therefore endeavour to grow their own food partly because their cash incomes are insufficient or non-existent. In cases where a household has access to a cash income, the presence of other equally compelling needs renders markets, as a source of food, too distant an option, if at all. Yet, while the choice to grow one's own food might be the most favoured option, it clearly is not a secure one. Land sizes are reducing rapidly and, coupled with a seeming decline in productivity, households may be forced to look beyond cultivation in their search for adequate food.

Therefore, whereas rural households and Kenya's food policy alike aspire to adequate food at all times, the strategies that are recommended to reach such a goal are not realisable in this rural area. The challenges that government strategies offer and what people encounter influence the choices households continuously make, in an attempt to address the real and perceived constraints facing them. Hence, for these households, a workable food policy would mean one that addresses their general livelihoods, and recognises the realities that exist and the diversity in how people interpret and experience the search for solutions to their day-to-day problems. Such a policy would then be one that focuses on issues relating to: how current macro level policies impact on the household, the dynamics that govern the flow and allocation of scarce resources, and how much government can delegate (and to whom), without jeopardising its people's entitlement to adequate food. In other words, what constitutes food security among rural households should play a more central role.

The road to food security: looking beyond entitlements

Discussions throughout this thesis clearly suggest that the food security of rural households treads a winding road, but one that is unlikely to be touched except in a tangential way by existing broad policy guidelines. The strategies that households employ, with the aim of realising their food security are interlocking and take shape within the livelihoods of the household networks that employ them. What households actually engage in, so as to meet their food needs, is a function of how their life chances unfold. Consequently, in everyday life, obtaining adequate food involves making trade-offs, choosing between odds, minimising limitations, confronting challenges only when the time comes, and having the stamina to carry on. Hence, at the rural household level, food security will continue to be contingent upon how these households perceive and thereafter actualise their livelihoods within the severe constraints that exist for the majority of those involved in the scope of this thesis.

My conclusion therefore is that food security results from a myriad of relationships and interactions and that these are enshrined in the ways households interpret and subsequently practice the search for adequate food. In addition to accessing necessary resources, mainly land and cash incomes, obtaining adequate food will remain a reality only for those households that are able to devise ways of meeting the rest of the needs that they consider so basic to life. Therefore, although command over adequate food supplies may emanate from 'good planning', it also depends on having the necessary resources and how the individuals concerned choose to organise the resources at hand and, hence, how they will interpret and interweave their experiences with the reality around them. Evidently, attaining food security hinges on much more than the entitlement relations envisaged by Amartya Sen. Nor can this be explained simply by balancing supply with demand, as argued by modernisation theories, or by gaining access to the primary factors of production, as portrayed in commoditisation theories. At the rural household level, the search for adequate food is best understood in terms of the outcome of complex processes of negotiation.

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GLOSSARY AND ACRONYMS

busaa	The traditional beer of the Gusii
AFC	Agricultural Finance Cooperation
CBS	Central Bureau of Statistics
chingeti	army worms
chingige	locusts
DAO	District Agricultural Officer
DC	District Commissioner
DDP	District Development Plan
debe	six *debes* are equivalent to about one 90 kilogramme bag of maize
Dev.	Development
DO	District Officer
dukas	These were maize buying centres that were established by the colonial government. Some of these centres were to become major markets. Currently, *duka* generally refers to a retail shop
EA	East Africa
ECA	Economic Commission for Africa
egeiseri	a type of food assistance. It is given in the form of flour and returned to the same measure
egeku	famine
egesangio	a work group made up of women from the same neighbourhood, who work on each other's fields on a reciprocal basis
emekabaru	The traditional maize seed of the Gusii
FAD	Food Availability Decline
gesarate	Commonly referred to as Gusii cattle villages, *gesarate* was the residence of young Gusii men, located at the frontier to guard Gusii settlements, among other assignments. Several of them are *ebisarate*
GMR	Guaranteed Minimum Return. An agricultural credit scheme
GoK	Government of Kenya

ha	Hectare. One hectare is equivalent to approximately 2.5 acres
HYV	High Yielding Variety
kg	Kilogramme
Kshs.	Kenya Shillings
langi	The famine of 1896 in Gusiiland
LH	Lower Highlands
LPA	Lagos Plan of Action
LR	Long Rains
mabati	corrugated iron sheets. A mabati roofed house is then commonly referred to as *ribati*
MoA	Ministry of Agriculture
MoPND	Ministry of Planning and National Development
moragoli	local maize seed
Nat.	National
NCPB	National Cereals and Produce Board
NDP	National Development Plan
NFNS	National Food and Nutrition Secretariat
nyabisagwa	The famine of 1914 in Gusiiland; also referred to as *nyabiage* or *nyamauga*
nyangweso	The famine of 1931 in Gusiiland; also known as *egeku kia Nyasoni*
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
ogosuma	seeking food assistance
ogosumia	giving food assistance
ogotobora	harvesting maize before its maturation period
ogotonda	engaging in the purchase of staple food (maize)
okogora	in contrast to *ogotonda*, this is purchasing at will
omotoriro	a container that is often used to in buying and selling maize. Eight of them make one *debe* and six *debes* make one 90 kg bag of maize
PC	Provincial Commissioner
PDA	Provincial Director of Agriculture
posho mills	Small scale maize mill. Also known as hammer mills
rigegu	Type of maize seed. Assumed to have replaced *emekebaru*

risaga	A work group that performed both routine and non-routine work for a member of the community. Payment was made in kind, often in the form of local brew
RoK	Republic of Kenya
SAPs	Structural Adjustment Programmes
SH	Smallholders
SP	Sessional Paper
SR	Short Rains
ugali	Staple food of the Gusii
UM	Upper Midlands
wimbi	finger millet

SUMMARY

There is an assumption within Kenya's food policy that the goal towards national self-sufficiency will automatically translate into food security at the rural household level, through any one of the following. One, by engaging in food cultivation, households could meet their food needs with a surplus for sale. On the other hand, by investing their land and related resources in those farm activities where they enjoy a comparative advantage, households could work towards generating a cash income with which they can then acquire their food needs on the market, just like those engaged off-farm are assumed to do. As highlighted in this thesis, the ideology underlying the country's search for food security has continued to focus on policies that aim at making food available, while taking for granted, the ability of individual households to obtain this food. Food security is therefore seen in terms of the availability of agricultural inputs, credit, research and extension, marketing and distribution, maintaining strategic reserves, monitoring and early warning, and food intake patterns. However, in Kisii District, a high potential region, and one that was once food abundant, it is now common to find households going hungry, not long after harvest. The question is, therefore, how has this come about?

Three lines of discussion can be drawn from how existing literature perceives the failure to obtain adequate amounts of required food. According to the modernisation school, the hungry are short of food because of their reluctance to embrace commercial values, which are assumed to generate efficiency in resource mobilisation and use. Another argument is the view that the commodity relations arising from the commercialisation of the factors of production engender hunger and this is perpetuated by imbalances in terms of trade, a skewed distribution of resources and neo-liberal policies. Although opposing in inclination, these two perspectives tend to postulate that food security is a function of supply versus demand. But, in so doing, they fail to account for the co-existence between hunger and abundant supply. In an attempt to explain this impasse, a third approach argues that food insecurity results from a failure in entitlements, that is, the right to obtain sufficient amounts of the food that is available. According to this approach, people go hungry because of a breakdown in the relations governing their access to food, following a shift in exchange mappings or, a loss of possessions. Hence, food insecurity can exist without any (substantial) decline in the general supply of food and, even when food shortages are widespread, they do not affect everyone uniformly. Nevertheless, this explanation too does not account for the complexities that surround the search for adequate food and, in particular, how the individuals concerned continue to shape and re-shape these processes.

In this thesis, therefore, the search for food security is perceived as a social process. I argue that obtaining adequate food is an outcome of a network of relations, and these are a function of the historical, social, economic, political, technical and cultural transformations that have characterised rural livelihoods over time, processes that are

nevertheless mediated by people's conceptualisations of their life chances, and their day-to-day experiences. The aim then is to understand what goes on at the rural household level, during the search for food, and how adequate food comes about, and for whom in particular. Discussions are based on a study that was undertaken in Kitutu Chache, Kisii District. Background information was obtained using life history accounts, government policy documents and records existing in the National Archives. Thereafter, I conducted a survey on 240 households, eight of whom I took up for in-depth study, lasting for a total of 18 months. In order to supplement and enrich discussions, I also undertook a year-round observation of the agricultural activities in the area. These observations focused on what people did, how they did it, when and who actually undertook what tasks. This study's analytical framework is therefore a combination of both qualitative and quantitative techniques.

In order to understand how command over adequate food continues to elude some rural households, I go 'back in time' to look at the transformations that have taken place (or failed to take place) in Kisii District. It is noted that in the days before colonial rule, the way of life of the Gusii centred around food production. The Gusii calendar began and ended with the starting and completion of farm activities, seasons were named according to the agricultural cycle and, feasts and ceremonies centred around food harvests. And, during the movement towards production for the market, the Gusii on the most part seemed to benefit from the fact that this served to expand market relations that they were already engaged in, as they traded their food surpluses with necessities from their neighbours. However, from one harvest shortfall to another, and following a movement away from cultivating food crops to growing conventional cash crops, mainly tea, coffee and pyrethrum, the Gusii's relationship with markets changed from an outlet for their farm produce and therefore a source of income, to a source of food but one where access was not always guaranteed. Even then, instead of a complete movement away from cultivating some or all their food, rural households in Gusiiland seem not to envisage 'life without growing own food'. Most of them have continued to engage in producing for the market, and for their own consumption, with varied levels of success.

Five different types of food security strategies are identified. Over the years, the majority of households (41%) obtained their food through cultivation and purchases. A further 32 percent supplemented cultivation with purchases and seeking assistance. Only slightly less than one quarter (24%) of the households continued to pursue cultivation only as a strategy, and a few (3%) depended on seeking assistance as the only alternative to a shortfall in harvests. But, none of these strategies is a permanent feature of rural households. For example, in 1995, three quarters (75%) of the households depended on cultivation only while only 14 percent supplemented cultivation with purchases. The rest supplemented harvests with seeking assistance (4%) or seeking assistance and purchases (6%). One household disengaged from cultivation and was, during this period, dependant on purchases only. These movements suggest that the application of anyone strategy depends on how the

individuals concerned perceive the reality around them and, how other aspects of their lives unfold. In general, the choice of these strategies is characterised by contestations and trade-offs, most of it as a result of a difficulty to reconcile the real with the expected. Furthermore, these specific and seemingly independent strategies actually interlock and, to a large extent, they are embedded in people's livelihoods. Hence, sometimes, households continue to pursue strategies that do not necessarily enhance their food needs except that this is what their lifeworld can accommodate.

Given the central role that cultivation occupies both at the policy and household levels, I take this up for further analysis. I discuss the production process by looking at the interrelatedness in farm practices, the incongruity in approach and the ideology underlying the choices that are manifest in people's everyday lives. Data show that the farm practices that are manifest in these rural households are neither 'modernised' nor 'incorporated'. Instead, commodity relations are interwoven into people's livelihoods and, the enrolment of anyone practice is subjected to very specific considerations and, the choices made are not necessarily dependent on those practices that are already as it were on board. Hence, cultivation as a source of food is an embodiment of how each household conceptualises 'available' resources, a process that shapes and is, in turn, shaped by everyday experiences. As such, homogeneous farm practices result in heterogenous yields while similar unit outputs also follow from diverse agronomic practices.

Despite its central place, cultivation did not meet the food needs of about 40 percent of the households. While the assumption is that such households will meet this shortfall from the market and other existing sources, the number of food deficit households reduced only marginally when supplies from both purchasing and seeking assistance were taken into account. Instead, linking up with others, for purposes of obtaining food assistance has reduced to a token measure while purchasing food continues to be found undesirable. However, the movement towards markets as a source of food is also increasingly seen as emerging from a capacity to handle food shortages. The Gusii nonetheless continue to differentiate between being pushed into markets (*ogotonda*) and turning to them out of choice (*okogora*). Therefore, what seems to count (most) in this differentiation is, having a source of income that is also steady and sufficient, and hence the absence of competing demands for the same resources as would be required to purchase food. Despite their being considered as temporary recourse, and, disregarding the trade-offs that are involved, over time, purchasing food and seeking assistance constitute a crucial component in the Gusii's food security patterns.

The complexity of household food security is pursued further by looking at how some households succeed while others fail in the search for adequate food. Discussions show that command over adequate food tends to vary with household size, family life cycle, amount of land under maize, quantity of food harvested and how food supplies are managed. However, some of the households that seem to 'fulfil' these requirements nevertheless fail to obtain required food. This suggests that command over adequate food depends on much more than one's ownership bundle. Instead, whether a given

ownership bundle could translate into adequate food (or not) is a function of how the individuals concerned perceive and thereafter problematise their situation. Hence, whereas food security depends on the ability to command an adequate source of food, this may remain unattained if those in need do not gain sufficient and/or predictable command over anyone or a combination of existing food sources or, if this command is gained at the expense of other basic needs. Hence, different people feel food secure (or insecure) for very different reasons.

Therefore, in addition to accessing necessary resources, mainly land and cash incomes, obtaining adequate food will remain a reality only for those households that are able to devise ways of meeting the rest of the needs that they consider so basic to life. In everyday life, obtaining adequate food involves making trade-offs, choosing between odds, minimising limitations, confronting challenges only when the time comes, and having the stamina to carry on. Evidently, attaining food security hinges on much more than the entitlement relations envisaged by Amartya Sen and nor can this be explained simply by balancing supply with demand, as argued by modernisation theories, or by gaining access to the primary factors of production, as portrayed in commoditisation theories. At the rural household level, the search for adequate food is best understood in terms of the outcome of complex processes of negotiation. Hence, one of the major recommendations to policy makers is the need to go beyond the structural components of food security by placing people's general livelihoods at the centre of these policies.

SAMENVATTING

Het voedselbeleid van de Keniaanse overheid gaat er vanuit dat de doelstelling van nationale zelfvoorziening zich automatisch vertaalt in voedselveiligheid op het niveau van rurale huishoudens als voldaan wordt aan de volgende aspecten. Als huishoudens voedsel produceren, kunnen ze hun behoeften aan voedsel vervullen door het geproduceerde surplus te verkopen op de markt. Door hun land en andere hulpbronnen te gebruiken voor agrarische activiteiten waarmee een comparatief voordeel is te behalen, kunnen huishoudens evenals degenen die buiten de landbouw actief zijn, een geldelijk inkomen genereren waarmee op de markt voedsel kan worden gekocht. Dit proefschrift betoogt dat de ideologie van s' lands voedselbeleid zich continu heeft gericht op het beschikbaar komen van voedsel waarbij ervan wordt uitgegaan dat de afzonderlijke huishoudens in staat zijn dit voedsel te bemachtigen. Voedselveiligheid wordt dan geconceptualiseerd in termen van beschikbaarheid van landbouwbenodigdheden, krediet, onderzoek en voorlichting, vermarkting en voedselconsumptie. In Kisii District, met een in agrarisch opzicht hoog potentieel en ooit gekenmerkt door een overdaad aan voedsel, is het thans echter niet ongewoon dat huishoudens voedsel tekorten kennen, zelfs kort na de oogst. De vraag die nu gesteld moet worden is hoe deze situatie is ontstaan.

Uit de bestaande literatuur zijn drie discussies te destilleren die voedseltekorten en het falen van het verkrijgen van voldoende voedsel pogen te verklaren. De moderniseringschool ziet voedseltekorten als resultaat van een hardnekkige weerstand tegen commerciële waarden en normen waarvan wordt aangenomen dat ze het efficiënter mobiliseren en gebruiken van hulpbronnen bevorderen. Een andere opvatting is dat de hierin besloten commercialisering van de productiefactoren nu juist honger voortbrengt en dat dit wordt bestendigd door onevenwichtige handelsvoorwaarden, een ongelijke verdeling van hulpbronnen en neoliberaal beleid. Hoewel deze benaderingen ogenschijnlijk tegengesteld zijn, stellen beide dat voedselveiligheid een functie is van vraag en aanbod. Het fenomeen dat honger en voldoende aanbod gelijktijdig voorkomen, kunnen beide benaderingen echter niet verklaren. In een poging deze impasse te doorbreken, stelt de *entitlement* benadering dat voedseltekorten resulteren uit het falen van het leggen van claims op voedsel. Volgens deze benadering komt honger voort uit het uiteenvallen van de maatschappelijke relaties die de toegang tot voedsel reguleren en/of vanwege een verlies aan bezittingen en hulpbronnen. Er kan dus sprake zijn van voedselonveiligheid zonder een (substantiële) afname in het aanbod van voedsel. Bovendien hoeft niet iedereen er in dezelfde mate onder te lijden als voedselonveiligheid toeneemt. Desalniettemin, slaagt ook de *entitlement* benadering er niet helemaal in om de complexe zoektocht naar voldoende voedsel in kaart te brengen, en ook niet hoe de betrokken individuen deze zoektocht ondernemen en telkens weer anders vorm geven.

Dit proefschrift conceptualiseert om deze redenen de zoektocht naar voedselveiligheid als een maatschappelijk proces. Het centrale argument is dat het

verkrijgen van voldoende voedsel besloten ligt in een complex netwerk van sociale verhoudingen die onderhevig zijn aan historische, sociale, economische, politieke, technische en culturele veranderingsprocessen die het levensonderhoud op het platteland karakteriseren. Deze processen moeten worden gezien als zijnde vorm gegeven door de wijze waarop mensen hun levenskansen conceptualiseren alsmede door hun dagelijkse ervaringen. Het doel dat ik me heb gesteld is om te begrijpen wat er zich afspeelt op het niveau van het huishouden tijdens de zoektocht naar voedsel, hoe voldoende voedsel tot stand komt en voor wie in het bijzonder. De uiteenzetting is gebaseerd op een studie uitgevoerd in Kitutu Chache in Kisii District, Kenia. De benodigde achtergrondinformatie werd verkregen uit de analyse van tal van levensgeschiedenissen van betrokken actoren, beleidsdocumenten van de overheid en historisch archiefmateriaal afkomstig van de *National Archives* in Nairobi. Daarnaast heb ik gebruik gemaakt van een vragenlijst die voor 240 huishoudens zijn ingevuld. Hieruit zijn 8 gevalstudies gekozen om in detail na te gaan hoe de toegang tot voedsel wordt verkregen. In totaal duurde de veldstudie 18 maanden. Teneinde de discussie over voedsel goed te kunnen voeren, heb ik ook alle agrarische activiteiten in het gebied een jaar lang nauwgezet gevolgd. Hierdoor verkreeg ik een gedetailleerd overzicht van wat mensen deden, hoe ze het deden, wanneer en wie uiteindelijk welke taken uitvoerde. De studie maakte aldus gebruik van een combinatie van kwantitatieve en kwalitatieve technieken.

Om te begrijpen hoe controle over voldoende voedsel aan sommige huishoudens is ontglipt, ga ik 'terug in de tijd' door de veranderingen die zich in Kisii District hebben voltrokken (of die zich nu juist niet hebben voorgedaan) te bestuderen. De levenswijze van de Gusii speelde zich in de voor-koloniale periode vooral af rondom de productie van voedsel. De kalender van de Gusii bestond uit het opstarten en de beëindiging van agrarische activiteiten. De seizoenen werden vernoemd naar de fasen van de agrarische cyclus. Rituelen en feesten waren verbonden met voedsel en oogsten. Ook ruilden de Gusii voedsel met volkeren bij hen in de buurt voor andere benodigdheden. Terwijl de Gusii langzaam maar zeker de productie gingen vermarkten, konden ze de nieuw aangegane marktverhoudingen dan ook relatief eenvoudig om buigen in hun eigen voordeel daar deze gezien werden als een welkome verbreding van reeds lang bestaande ruilverhoudingen en ervaringen met markten. Echter als gevolg van tegenvallende oogsten en een verschuiving van de productie van voedselgewassen naar handelsgewassen als thee, koffie en pyrethrum, veranderden de verhoudingen die de Gusii met markten onderhielden sterk van karakter. Deed de markt eerst vooral dienst als afzet van landbouwproducten en dus als bron van inkomsten, in toenemende mate fungeert ze als bron van voedsel waar toegang niet altijd verzekerd is. Een leven waarin voedsel zelf niet meer wordt geproduceerd, wordt in Gusiiland echter niet geambieerd. Een totale verschuiving van de productie van voedsel naar die van handelsgewassen heeft zich dan ook niet voorgedaan. In tegendeel, de meeste huishoudens blijven voor de markt en voor zich zelf produceren, hoewel met wisselend succes.

Vijf verschillende strategieën gericht op voedselveiligheid zijn gedurende het onderzoek geïdentificeerd. Door de jaren heen voorziet de meerderheid van de huishoudens (41%) in hun voedsel door het zelf te verbouwen en de tekorten aan te vullen middels aankoop op de markt. Een verdere 32 percent verbouwt zelf het voedsel maar vult tekorten aan door het aan te kopen op de markt én het zoeken van hulp bij familieleden en vrienden. Slechts iets minder dan een kwart van de huishoudens (24%) is in staat om voldoende voedsel zelf te produceren. Een enkeling bleek volledig afhankelijk te zijn van het zoeken van hulp als alternatief voor een tekortschietende oogst. Maar geen van deze strategieën weerspiegelt iets permanents. In 1995 bijvoorbeeld, waren de strategieën van driekwart van de huishoudens (75%) gebaseerd op het zelf verbouwen van voedsel, terwijl slechts 14 percent naast eigen verbouw ook voedsel aankocht. De rest zocht aanvullende hulp (4%) of combineerde hulp met aankopen van voedsel (6%). Eén huishouden had zich volledig terug getrokken uit de verbouw van voedsel en kocht gedurende deze periode al het voedsel op de markt. Deze bewegingen en veranderingen suggereren dat de toepassing van een bepaalde strategie is ingebed in de wijze waarop de betrokken huishoudens de werkelijkheid inschatten en hoe andere aspecten van hun (dagelijks) leven hun weerslag hebben op keuzes. De keuze van deze strategieën wordt over het algemeen gekenmerkt door afwegingen en moeilijke keuzes, vooral als gevolg van pogingen de werkelijkheid in overeenstemming te brengen met het verwachte resultaat. Deze specifieke en schijnbaar onafhankelijke strategieën grijpen in werkelijkheid in elkaar en zijn in hoge mate verweven met het bestaan van mensen. Huishoudens blijken soms vast te houden aan strategieën die niet noodzakelijkerwijs voldoende voedsel opleveren waarbij alternatieve strategieën onmogelijk zijn gezien hun leefwereld.

Aangezien de productie van voedsel een centrale rol vervult in zowel het overheidsbeleid als op huishoudniveau, analyseer ik dit aspect in detail. Ik analyseer voor dat doel het productieproces door te kijken naar de onderlinge verbanden van de boerenpraktijken, de incongruentie in de benadering ervan en de onderliggende ideologie van de keuzes die zich manifesteert in het dagelijks leven van mensen. De gegevens laten zien dat de boerenpraktijken noch als 'modern' noch als 'geïncorporeerd' te karakteriseren zijn. Integendeel, marktverhoudingen zijn verweven met de wijze waarop mensen in hun levensonderhoud voorzien. Over de uitvoering van bepaalde praktijken en taken wordt uitvoerig beraadslaagd en keuzes waarvoor ze zich gesteld zien, zijn niet noodzakelijkerwijs gebaseerd op datgene wat men reeds lang praktiseert. Het zelf verbouwen van voedsel is de neerslag van een inschatting van de hulpbronnen waarover het huishouden beschikt. En dat moet gezien worden als onderdeel van een proces dat inhoud en vorm geeft aan de dagelijkse ervaringen. Vandaar dat homogene boerenpraktijken resulteren in heterogene uitkomsten (zoals opbrengst) en dezelfde inputs voortkomen uit verschillende agronomische praktijken.

Ondanks het gegeven dat het zelf verbouwen van voedsel een zeer centrale plaats inneemt, draagt het voor 40 percent van de huishoudens niet volledig bij aan de totale behoefte aan voedsel. Gaan we ervan uit dat zulke huishoudens hun tekorten aanvullen

met het aankopen van voedsel en middels andere bronnen, dan neemt het aantal huishoudens dat een voedseltekort zal hebben slechts marginaal af als we aankoop en hulp in beschouwing nemen. Relaties aanknopen met andere actoren om voedselhulp te krijgen, is sterk in aanzien gedaald. Het aankopen van voedsel wordt óók niet echt geambieerd en niet echt beschouwd als een alternatief. De steeds belangrijker wordende rol van de markt als bron voor voedsel wordt echter gezien als een 'handigheid' om met voedseltekorten om te gaan. De Gusii maken niet voor niets een onderscheid naar de markt als een noodzakelijk kwaad (*ogotonda*) en de markt als een keuze (*okogora*). Wat hierbij blijkbaar een rol vervult is dat een zekere en voldoende bron van inkomsten voor de aankoop van voedsel betekent dat andere hiermee concurrerende behoeften afwezig zijn. Desalniettemin en ondanks het geven dat het aankopen van voedsel slechts als een tijdelijk iets wordt beschouwd, zijn door de tijd heen het aankopen van voedsel alsmede het zoeken naar voedselhulp belangrijke elementen van de patronen van voedselzekerheid die waarneembaar zijn bij de Gusii.

De complexe realiteit van voedselzekerheid op huishoudniveau wordt verder uiteengezet met het zoeken naar waarom het ene huishouden er wel in slaagt en de andere niet in staat is om voldoende voedsel te verwerven. In de uiteenzetting laat ik zien dat controle over voldoende voedsel tendeert te variëren met de grootte van het huishouden, de demografische cyclus, de omvang van het maïsveld, de geoogste hoeveelheden voedsel en hoe de voedselvoorraden beheerd worden. Door in te gaan op de factoren waarvan wordt aangenomen dat ze een belangrijke rol spelen bij het verkrijgen van voedsel, wordt duidelijk dat sommige huishoudens die voldoen aan alle criteria van voedselzekerheid er toch niet in slagen om voldoende voedsel te verwerven. Dit suggereert dat de controle over voldoende voedsel afhangt van meer dan alleen maar de controle over voedsel die verloopt via het in 'eigendom' hebben van de middelen. Integendeel, of een gegeven recht zich kan vertalen in voldoende voedsel of niet is een functie van hoe de betrokken individuen hun eigen situatie inschatten en problematiseren. Terwijl voedselzekerheid afhankelijk is van de mogelijkheid om controle uit te oefenen over een voldoende hoeveelheid voedsel, blijft voedselzekerheid toch iets ongewis als degenen die behoefte hebben aan voedsel niet over één of een combinatie van meerdere hulpbronnen beschikken, of als het ten koste gaat van andere basisbehoeften. Daarom voelen tal van mensen zich voedsel(on)zeker om zeer verschillende redenen.

Hulpbronnen als land en een geldelijk inkomen zijn belangrijk voor het verkrijgen van voedsel. Maar dit is alleen binnen het bereik van die huishoudens die er daarnaast in slagen om ook de andere basisbehoeften te bevredigen. In het dagelijks leven heeft het verkrijgen van voldoende voedsel betrekking op het inschatten van allerlei neveneffecten, het maken van ongelijke keuzes, het opereren binnen een beperkte speelruimte, uitdagingen aangaan alleen als de tijd er rijp voor is, en het uithoudingsvermogen om door te gaan. Het is duidelijk dat het streven naar voedselzekerheid niet alleen maar draait om, zoals Amartya Sen het formuleert, de maatschappelijke relaties die het recht op voedsel vorm geven. Voedselzekerheid kan

ook niet alleen maar eenvoudigweg verklaard worden, zoals beargumenteerd door modernisatie theorieën, door vraag en aanbod met elkaar in evenwicht te brengen. Hetzelfde kan gezegd worden van de theorieën die zich richten op de processen die een rol spelen bij de commercialisering van de belangrijke productiefactoren. Voedselzekerheid op het niveau van rurale huishoudens is het best te begrijpen als zijnde de uitkomst van een complex proces van onderhandelingen. Een van de belangrijkste aanbevelingen voor beleidsmakers is dat zij het voorzien in het levensonderhoud centraal moeten stellen in hun beleid en niet alleen eenzijdig de zogenaamde structurele componenten van voedselzekerheid in hun beschouwingen moeten betrekken.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Mary Omosa is a daughter of Rufina Kerubo and Peter Omosa Simba. She has four sisters: Flo; Sue; Leen & Jossie, and three brothers: Oliver; Julius & Nonnie. She is married to Orina Momanyi and they have one child, Biko. She holds both a B.A. (Hons.) and an M.A. (Sociology) from the University of Nairobi. Some of her academic works include, an Honours Dissertation focusing on *People's Perceptions of Development* (1985) and a Master's Thesis titled *The Fuelwood Crisis in Rural Kenya: A Socio-Economic Analysis of the Fuelwood Scarcity in Bura Irrigation settlement Scheme, Tana River District* (1988). In October 1994, she began PhD research at Wageningen Agricultural University, culminating in a Thesis titled *Re-Conceptualising Food Security: Interlocking Strategies, Unfolding Choices and Rural Livelihoods in Kisii District, Kenya* (1998). She has also attended short courses on *Food and Nutrition Studies* - Egerton, 1990; *Regional Development Planning* - Nagoya, 1993; *Agricultural Policy Teaching and Research* - Harare, 1993; *Advancing the Status and Contribution of Women* - London, 1994.

In January 1988, she joined the Institute for Development Studies, University of Nairobi as a member of staff. Her duties include research and teaching. She has undertaken several collaborative and individually designed research projects. Some of the more recent ones are:

1993-94: A Socio-Economic Assessment of the Sweet Potato Market Potential in Nairobi, Kenya. Sponsored by the International Potato Centre (CIP).

1993-94: Population Growth, Land Use and Development in Kenya. Funded by the Union for African Population Studies (UAPS).

1992-93: Disaster Management and Preparedness: An Evaluation of Irrigation Farming and Food Self-Sufficiency - The Case of Perkerra Irrigation Settlement Scheme, Baringo District. Funded by the Organisation for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa (OSSREA).

1988-89: Impact Study Evaluation on USAID Training Program for Development in Kenya (USAID).

1988-89: The Bura Fuelwood Research Programme (FINNIDA).

She has been a resource person at several forums. In 1995, she was a member of a taskforce reviewing the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies for purposes of preparing a country position paper for the Women's Conference in Beijing. In 1991-94, she participated in organising joint IDS/World Bank training seminars on *Strategic Planning for Agriculture: Creating Incentives for Growth and Development at the District Level.* In 1992 she participated in the NGO consultative meetings in preparation for the *Earth Summit* in Rio de Janeiro. She has also consulted for several donor agencies, governmental, and non-governmental organisations in the areas of woodfuel; agroforestry; soil conservation; rural credit schemes; training and general development issues. She has attended and presented several seminar and conference papers. Her current research

interests revolve around issues relating to food security, smallholder agriculture and natural resource management.

Some of her publications include:

1998: *Population growth, land use and food self-sufficiency in Kenya: A comparative analysis of small and medium-large scale land holdings in Kisii and Nyamira Districts.* Dakar: Union for African Population Studies (UAPS). No. 31.

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