

Agriculture and Food Security in Kenya

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For many decades there has been a continuous discussion on food security and its effects in Africa both at local and global forums. For instance, according to Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Egypt has approximately 3% arable land along Nile Valley and Delta and crop production is mainly done under irrigation technology. That is way below Kenya's arable land at 10%. Surprisingly, Kenya imports tons of fruits and legumes from Egypt and Israel, with equally less arable land.

Every year there are reported cases of severe drought and famine along Kenya's Kerio Valley basin. This has led to loss of human lives, livestock deaths, and total crop failure. The annual remedial approach by the governments and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) has been reactionary, a rush to supply relief food to the affected regions. This has never been and won't be a solution to food insecurity.

The Kerio Valley basin has favorable weather, good soil structure, and plenty of water from several rivers flowing from the uplands and estimated billions of liters of water underground that need to be harnessed and utilized through such water harvesting facilities as dams. However, the worry has been continuous loss of top soil due to surface run-off during rainy seasons.

The game-changer to food security in Kenya should be application of modern irrigation technologies in crop production. With warm temperatures experienced in most regions, production of short season crops should be made possible through irrigation. And this should make Kenya food sufficient: if Egyptian and Israeli deserts can yield produce enough to feed their people and surplus for export, why not Kenya with better soil, plenty of water and other favorable conditions?

In addition, a change of eating habits from dependence on long season crops such as maize to consuming fast maturing short season crops such as sorghum, millet, grain legumes, sweet potatoes, or arrowroots should be encouraged. Finally, agricultural extension and research services should be fully funded by national and county governments.