
LIFE IN A TIME OF FOOD PRICE VOLATILITY

Evidence from the poor and vulnerable in
Mukuru and Lango Baya, Kenya

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This is an exploratory study, aimed at filling the gap in evidence and understanding of the impact that volatile food prices are having on the lives of poor people living in urban and rural areas in Kenya. It also aims to contribute to much more informed local debates and policy dialogue around food security. It is a follow up to a similar study conducted in 2012 in the same area and seeks to find out what has changed since then. It draws on 100 participants from two communities in Mukuru and Lango Baya purposively selected to represent poorest urban and rural areas respectively. The study reveals increased cost of food and other essential commodities which has pushed the cost of living to unbearable levels for the poor and vulnerable in the past year. In addition, most people are on their own as institutions which are considered to be responsible for protecting them from hunger have continued to perform poorly.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The aim of this study was to investigate and document poor people's experiences of food price volatility in Kenya. It focused on two communities in Mukuru (Nairobi) and Lango Baya (Malindi), purposively selected to represent the poorest urban and rural areas respectively. It is a follow-up to a similar study conducted in 2012 in the same areas with the same people and seeks to find out what has changed since then.

Primary qualitative data was collected and analysed from at least 100 participants drawn from both sites. In each site, at least four focus group discussions, ten household interviews and five key informant interviews were conducted to generate data for the study. The participants represented specific categories of the poor and vulnerable in the study communities. In Mukuru, these included: the elderly, male youth, female youth, women-headed households, men, and those living with HIV/AIDS, particularly in household discussions. The youth, elders, farmers, traders and those living with HIV/AIDS were the categories of participants in Lango Baya.

The results show that the prices of food and other essential commodities have been on the increase throughout the year. This has pushed up the cost of living, making life unbearable for the poor and vulnerable. Some of the commonly consumed food types whose prices have increased include: maize flour, milk, bread, vegetables and cooking fat/oil, among others. The cost of essential non-food commodities for the participants in both sites such as kerosene, charcoal, rent, pesticides and diesel was also reported to have increased.

As a way of coping with increased cost of food, participants in both sites are eating the same type of food almost daily which is *ugali* and vegetables. They are also eating reduced portions of food, substituting some types of food with less expensive ones, and removing completely certain types of food from their diet, mostly animal protein such as meat and fish. Lastly, respondents are skipping meals, much more than they did in the previous year. Overall, most people feel that they are not eating well this year compared to the previous year of the research, in 2012.

The analysis also shows high awareness of rights to food among the respondents, although they are not aware of where or from whom they should claim these rights. The government is expected to be the most responsible in protecting people against hunger, followed by NGOs and local churches. For the government, responsibility is considered an official mandate. Overall, the respondents felt that these institutions, particularly the government, have not performed well in ensuring food security or curbing hunger so far. In addition, there are no measures put in place to monitor the food/hunger situation in the local areas by government or any other institution considered responsible for ensuring food security. These institutions have also not been held to account where there have been episodes of food insecurity or hunger.

The study concludes that accountability in local governance of food insecurity/hunger is weak. Government efforts, especially in the form of emergency food aid/relief food, although important, are sporadic, unpredictable and ineffective in reducing chronic poverty. Efforts by other institutions such as NGOs and churches, although positive, have only managed to reach a minority, leaving aside a large part of the population that is vulnerable and in need of food and other forms of assistance.

1 INTRODUCTION

The overall purpose of this research project was to investigate and document poor people's experiences of food price volatility in Kenya. It focused on two very distinct communities in Mukuru and Lango Baya, purposively selected to represent the poorest urban and rural areas respectively. It is a follow up to a similar study conducted in 2012 (year 1) in the same areas and seeks to find out what has changed since. This report should therefore be read as a companion to the year 1 report/findings.

The study aimed for an overall assessment of the situation at community level, by exploring impacts of food prices on local economic activity and livelihood, individual and community wellbeing and security, household coping strategies, formal and informal social protection responses and local governance of food security/accountability for hunger.

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How does food price volatility affect the wellbeing of people on low/precarious incomes?
2. How do these people cope with change? Particularly in relation to food prices?
3. What sources of formal and informal support are available?
4. Who answers to the hungry? /What works locally to activate accountability for hunger?

This research seeks to generate a robust multi-dimensional assessment of the impacts of food price volatility on people's wellbeing and the responses they generate in the mentioned study areas/locations. It also seeks to engage policymakers and practitioners in developing 'spike-proof' social protection and food security policies and strengthen local capacities to monitor food and nutrition security. Lastly, it's aimed at contributing to much more informed local debates and policy dialogue on food security.

This study is part of a four-year research project that Oxfam and IDS have embarked on so as to better understand the impact that food price volatility is having in different communities around the world. The project aims to fill the gap in evidence and understanding of the impact that volatile food prices are having on the lives of poor people living in rural and urban areas, including personal income and finance, health, social, family and security. The research project covers the following ten countries: Kenya, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Zambia, Burkina Faso, Vietnam, Bolivia, Pakistan, Guatemala and Ethiopia. This national research report is a contribution to that project.

ORGANIZATION OF THE PAPER

This report is organized into four sections. Following this introduction, section two looks at the methods used in data collection. Section three reviews the country context in relation to food prices, food security and social protection. Section four discusses in detail the main findings about food prices and section five looks at local accountability for hunger/food security.

2 METHODS

OVERALL PROJECT METHODS

The overall research methodology has been designed to enable analysis of the local impacts of complex global events and processes. Through it, we are testing a series of propositions about the impacts on dimensions of the wellbeing of different groups, through pathways triggered by changing food prices. The *Life in a Time of Food Price Volatility* project has three component activities namely:

1. Food security indicator tracking aimed at generating a picture of what has been happening to food security and food prices.
2. Qualitative research, with short annual visits to groups and households. Eight of the sites have been visited annually since 2009, and so 2013 was the fifth annual visit: in the remaining 15 sites, research was initiated in 2012. Details of the research sites are available in the year 1 report.¹ In each community, we follow at least 10 households, conduct 5 key informant interviews, and hold focus group discussions with at least four different social and occupation groups, in addition to gathering other primary and secondary data at the community level. In total 1500 people participate in the research each year.
3. Integrated qualitative and quantitative analyses of the impacts of food price changes on wellbeing, drawing on nationally representative poverty data for each country. Findings from quantitative research will be integrated into year 3 and year 4 reports.

RESEARCHING ACCOUNTABILITY FOR HUNGER AND FOOD SECURITY

To research accountability for hunger, the methodology drew on the triangular conceptual framework developed for the 2004 World Development Report 'Making Services Work for Poor People' (see Figure 1). This triangle summarizes the main relationships of accountability between:

1. Citizens and politicians/policymakers: citizens mandate governments to protect food rights, set standards and monitor or create information, often via political parties, civil society action, donor influence, and even research like ours;
2. Politicians/policymakers and frontline providers: policymakers set standards for performance, provide budgets and authority, set up information systems, monitor performance and sanction failures;
3. Citizens and frontline providers: citizens make claims on providers, provide feedback about performance, and take direct action when services fail.

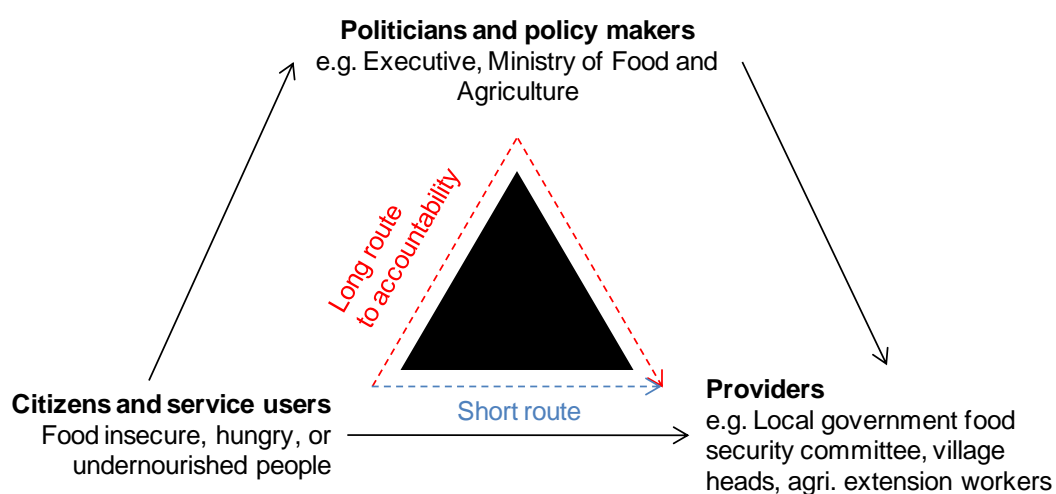
The focus of our field research was mainly on the third relationship. Yet whether or not there was a right to food and resources to match, how frontline officials are monitored and sanctioned meant entering into the political and policymaking relationships of the first and second.

¹ Hossain, N., King, R. and Kelbert, A., 'Squeezed: Life in a Time of Food Price Volatility, Year 1 results', Oxfam International: Oxford, <http://www.oxfam.org.uk/squeezed> (last accessed 10 June 2014)

To study how accountability mechanisms were working at the local level, we asked people to tell us what hungry people were entitled to and what a right to food meant to them. We also asked them to describe systems and experiences of finding out about, trying to access and complaining or taking action when support fell short of their expectations. We adopted an accepted framework for analysing accountability mechanisms in public service delivery, which includes: i) the mandates or remits for action; ii) standards for programming or provision; iii) the existence of monitoring systems and iv) enforcement or sanctions.

Each country research team was provided with sample guides and topic lists, but these were adapted to make sense of the local language and context. Transcripts from interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed, translated into English, and coded using a common coding framework using NVivo 10 software.

Figure 1: Conceptualising relationships of accountability for food security



Source: Developed from World Bank (2003)

COUNTRY RESEARCH METHODS

The study sites for the second year of this research remained unchanged. They are Mukuru and Lango Baya. Both of these sites are home to some of Kenya's poorest urban and rural communities respectively. In terms of economic activities, most of the residents in Mukuru are involved in casual work and petty trading. Others work in the nearby factories as security guards, drivers, cooks, and artisans among other roles. A few inhabitants own rental houses in the slums and earn income from the rents collected. In Lango Baya, most of the inhabitants are farmers. Other than farming, the residents are also involved in tree cutting, charcoal burning and motor bike transport, especially amongst the young men. In both sites, the youth remain particularly vulnerable as most of them are either unemployed or doing casual jobs. In Lango Baya, many young people have migrated to Malindi town to look for jobs in the tourist hotels. Here, they are employed as cleaners, drivers, waiters, beach boys etc.

A structured research guide was provided to help researchers in data collection and data management for the second year of this study. The special topic for the second year shifted from youth and agriculture to local accountability for hunger. In Kenya, the research was managed by a research coordinator supported by a researcher and three research assistants. Unlike the first year, where the data collection process was done simultaneously in both sites by different teams, this second year we had one team working on both sites at different times. The interviews were run by two people: while one was asking the questions/interviewing respondents, the other one was taking notes. After the end of the day, the interviewer and note taker sat down together to write the reports/transcripts.

A total of 100 respondents were interviewed, 49 in Mukuru and 51 in Lango Baya. In Mukuru, we held five focus group discussions with elders, male youth, female youth, men- and women-headed households. In addition to these, ten household discussions were conducted and five key informant interviews. In Lango Baya, we held four focus group discussions with traders, farmers, elders and the youth. Just as in Mukuru, ten household discussions and five key informant interviews were also conducted in Lango Baya. Table 1 shows the distribution of the respondents.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents

	Mukuru		Lango Baya	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Focus Groups	18	13	19	14
Household discussions	4	9	3	10
Key Informant Interviews	1	4	3	2
Total	23	26	25	26

Source: Field Data in Mukuru and Lango Baya, 2013

Although we aimed to research with the same people as in Year 1 to enable track the changes overtime, in some instances, we couldn't find the same people and were therefore forced to replace some and add others where it was necessary to do so. This was particularly so for key informants in both sites most of whom were replacements as we aimed to talk to those who were much more knowledgeable on food security issues. In Mukuru for example, we were able to find and interview 29 respondents who participated in the study in year 1 while the rest 20 were new respondents. In Lango Baya, we found 28 respondents who participated in year 1 while the rest 23 were new participants. Table 2 shows the participation history of respondents.

Table 2: Respondents' participation history

	Mukuru	Percentage	Lango Baya	Percentage
Participated in year 1	29	59%	28	55%
Did not participate in year 1	20	41%	23	45%
Total	49	100%	51	100%

Unlike the first year of this research where the sessions were quite lengthy and in some instances the respondents became impatient, this year was different as the tools for the research were clearer and simpler. The longest sessions, which were focus group discussions, took two hours on average, while household and key informant discussions took approximately one to one and a half hours each. In addition, we had good community facilitators on the ground who were very resourceful in planning and helping us access the study participants. Therefore, we did not encounter any major challenge.

3 COUNTRY CONTEXT

As stated in the introduction, this report is a follow up to year 1 (2012) findings and seeks to investigate what has changed since then. A number of things have changed since 2012 that have had, and will continue to have, an impact on food security in Kenya. In this section, I highlight the changes that I consider important for food prices and food security in the country.

VAT ACT, 2013

Consumption tax in Kenya is operated through the Value Added Tax (VAT). Previously, VAT in the country was governed by the VAT Act Chapter 476 Laws of Kenya which became law in 1989. Since the 2011 financial year the government of Kenya has made various attempts to overhaul the VAT Act, which governs administration and enforcement of VAT in the country, through VAT bills in 2011, 2012 and currently the VAT Act of 2013. The intention of the overhaul is to increase government revenues, simplify VAT administration, reduce compliance costs and deal with the ever-increasing burden of VAT refunds which presents an administrative challenge to Kenya Revenue Authority (KRA).²

The VAT Act, 2013 reduces substantively the number of exempt and previously zero-rated goods and services. Initially, the Act had proposed to impose VAT on essential products such as bread, rice, maize flour and milk. These changes (debate and passing of the bill) were happening during the period at which the Kenyan team was collecting data for this study. The VAT 2013 bill was passed on 6 August 2013 and it was assented by the president eight days later. It was later gazetted and became an act of parliament. The Act became operational on 2 September 2013 and it put 16 percent tax on essential goods and services that had previously been zero-rated, such as: milk, maize, bread, wheat flour, sanitary towels, medical dressing and plasters, among others. As the changes started to take effect, it was obvious that the increased costs were being passed on to the consumer. The prices of these goods shot up significantly, making them very difficult for the poor as well as other middle income earners to afford. The citizens, joined by civil society groups, and some members of parliament from the opposition, were up in arms protesting the passing of this bill in the weeks that followed. Parliament was therefore under a lot of pressure to review this Act.

After parliament resumed its sittings on 17 September 2013 after a month-long break, the rise on the cost of living in the country was top of its agenda. Members of parliament debated this issue and an amendment was proposed. The following day, there was some relief for Kenyans as parliamentarians put their political differences aside and passed an amendment to the Act exempting bread, rice, milk, wheat, milk formula for infants, maize flour, first aid kits, vaccines, bandages and sanitary towels from the tax so as to cushion Kenyans, especially the poor, unemployed and low income earners.³ Although the amendment to the Act was passed, the cost of some goods did not fall back to their original prices. For example a 500ml packet of milk cost Ksh.35 before the introduction of VAT. After passing the bill, it shot up to Ksh.55–60. After amending the Act, it fell to Ksh.45, which is Ksh.10 more than its original price.

Apart from the introduction of VAT, other factors can be considered responsible for the continued increase of food prices, such as high fuel prices and weather conditions, to name just two. The increase in fuel prices always has a direct effect on the price of food, particularly for

² Taxwise Consulting, 2013

³ Standard Media, 2014

the poor. Fuel prices rose by one percent between August and September 2013 and were 12 percent above their five-year averages. In addition, both the October to December 2012 short rains and March to May 2013 long rains resulted in average to below average holdings of national strategic, household, trader, and miller food stocks, reducing food available for markets and consequently increasing food prices.⁴ Also, the cost of milk is always affected by the present weather conditions. When there is enough rain, farmers have enough fodder for their animals, leading to high supply of milk. The price usually decreases during such time/seasons. During dry seasons, the reverse occurs. It was dry at the time that the Kenyan team was collecting data (September–October, 2013) and at this time the milk supply was already strained, hence the high cost of the same. The short rains of October–December were just starting.

EXPANSION OF IRRIGATION SCHEMES

Kenya held its last general elections on 4 March 2013 which ushered in a new government, otherwise referred to as the ‘Jubilee government’. This government had its own promises to Kenyans in their manifesto. Some of these promises touched on food security and social protection. In an effort to ensure food security in the country, the Jubilee government promised to put one million acres of land under irrigation. This was far more ambitious than the Vision 2030 plan⁵, where the government had set itself a less ambitious target of putting 80,000 acres under irrigation each year.⁶

In early January 2014, the President of Kenya and leader of the Jubilee government officially commissioned the Galana-Kulalu food security programme model farm. This is expected to cover 10,000 acres out of the 1.2 mn acres of land for the entire project which will be put under irrigation. This land/ranch covers Tana River and Kilifi counties. Lango Baya, which is one site for this research, is in Kilifi county. The model farm will exhibit what will be done in the entire project and is expected to produce between 80 and 100 bags of maize annually per acre. Depending on the success of the model project, the country expects to harvest between 40 and 45 mn 90kg bags of maize from the project every year. This is expected to double the production of maize in the country.

The Ministry of Agriculture officials are only expected to lay the groundwork for the project, paving the way for the private sector to invest Ksh.250bn required under the private–public partnership arrangement. The project is expected to take five years to complete.⁷

EXPANSION OF CASH TRANSFER PROGRAMME

Kenya’s commitment to social protection is encoded in its constitution⁸ and in the National Social Protection Policy of 2012. Social protection programmes in Kenya fall under three categories which are: social security (pension), social health insurance and social assistance (safety nets). As a majority of people who benefit from social security (pensions) and health insurance are formal sector workers, social assistance programs are most relevant for the poor

⁴ FEWS NET, 2013

⁵ <http://www.vision2030.go.ke/>

⁶ Business Daily, 2014

⁷ standard media.co.ke

⁸ Constitution of Kenya, 2010

and vulnerable. A report by the World Bank on Kenya observes that while the number of people covered by cash transfer programmes has increased since 2005, they only reach about 8 percent of the poor population.⁹ Kenya's cash transfer programmes are small, fragmented and unable to respond when shocks hit. According to this report, improving the effectiveness of all social protection programmes operational in the country will require ramping up government spending on them, improving coordination among implementing agencies and building capacities for programmes to respond to shocks, using early warning systems and contingency funds that can mobilize additional resources when needed. The government is seeking to implement these recommendations through the establishment of the National Safety Net Programme.

The Jubilee government promised Kenyans that it would expand the cash transfer programme and on 4 February 2014, the president launched the expanded cash transfer programme dubbed '*Inua Jamii*', translated into English as 'a program that uplifts the lives of families'. This cash programme has four components, namely support for:

Orphans and other vulnerable children

- Those with severe disabilities
- Vulnerable elders aged more than 65 years
- The urban poor

The number of beneficiaries is expected to increase to 454,000 households and the government has already allocated Ksh.12 bn for the programme. This cash will be disbursed monthly to the beneficiaries through the mobile money transfer program known as M-PESA.

COUNTRY FOOD SITUATION ASSESSMENT IN 2013–14

In Kenya, food security has generally been viewed by policy makers and other segments of society as synonymous with maize availability. This is because maize is not only the main staple food but also the crop that is grown by most of the rural households, mainly for food. Maize production in Kenya is mainly rain-fed and hence erratic, and in recent years it has sometimes failed to meet national demand (e.g. 2008 and 2009), while other times, production has matched consumption (e.g. 2007 and 2012). It is only in a few years that the country has produced a surplus.¹⁰

The maize crop performance in 2013 was expected to be below that of 2012. The estimated total output for the 2013/2014 year is at 33.9 mn bags, which is 15 percent below the national consumption, estimated at 40 mn bags. This projected output is to April/May 2014. The decrease in production of maize in 2013 was due to a number of factors, such as delayed planting of maize in the bread basket areas due to heavy rains at planting time; delayed arrival of government subsidized fertilizer; reduced or lack of application of planting and topdressing fertilizers; farmers diversifying from maize production into other enterprises such as sugarcane, tea and dairy maize seeds, among others, which are viewed as more profitable.¹¹

In addition, despite the near average total rainfall in the south eastern and coastal marginal mixed farming livelihood zone, the rains ceased early and at a critical stage of crop development, especially for maize. As a result, crops wilted before maturity, except for some

⁹ (2013)

¹⁰ Kamau et al., 2013

¹¹ Kamau et al., 2013

leguminous crops including cowpeas and pigeon peas. Except for some pockets in northern coastal areas, the long rains' early cessation was expected to lead to below average production of both maize and other cereals.¹²

By the end of January 2014 the government, through the Agriculture Minister, warned of a looming food crisis in parts of the country, starting in June. This is because, as predicted earlier, the maize reserves are expected to run out in May 2014, two months before they can be replenished at the next harvest. Private traders were asked by the minister to start importing grain so as to avert the shortages. Counties in Coast, North Eastern, Upper Eastern and North Rift were among those hardest hit. The government released Ksh. 2.3 bn to be shared among the counties affected.¹³

Although the Minister insisted that at the time (January–May) there was no cause for worry, some parts of the country were already experiencing hunger reported in the national media.¹⁴ Overall, while the food security situation looked positive in the short-term, Kamau et al. (2013) recommend close monitoring of the 2013/2014 maize crop performance and food stocks in order to guard against volatility in food prices or shortfalls in maize supply that could threaten the country's food security in the medium-term. The government also needs to rethink intervening in the maize markets since this leads to high and volatile maize prices. Also, if the fertiliser subsidy programme is to achieve its intended purpose, there is need to restructure the current distribution channels to ensure that it reaches a larger number of farmers in different maize-growing areas, and is delivered in a timely manner.

¹² FEWS NET, 2013

¹³ (Daily Nation, 2014)

¹⁴ <http://reliefweb.int/report/kenya/millions-hit-starvation-threat>

4 MAIN FINDINGS ABOUT FOOD PRICE CHANGES

The respondents in both Mukuru and Lango Baya were of the view that the prices of food and other essential commodities had been on the increase throughout the past year. The general feeling among respondents was that the cost of living was too high for the common person and this was causing a lot stress to most people. For example, a fifty-two-year-old, unemployed woman in Mukuru noted the following:

I roast groundnuts and send my children to sell when they come home from school. The money that we get is used to buy food. Since the amount is not constant, I can only say that we spend more on food this year than last year. With one thousand shillings last year, we could buy several commodities. This year is different. One thousand shillings buys very few things. I fail to believe when I see the things I buy at a thousand shillings.

It is hard now. Last year if I had one hundred and fifty shillings, I would be able to buy maize flour, omena, salt, royco, cooking oil and water. Today if I have the same amount of money, it will not be enough. I will buy maize flour at one hundred shillings, omena at thirty shillings and there is not enough money to buy all the other things.

Thirty-eight year old man, community mobiliser, Lango Baya.

Even though most respondents in the two sites felt that the cost of living was too high for them, the data we collected on prices show some irregularities, with respondents estimating the size of change differently for similar items. In our effort to establish the correct figures for the same, we looked at other sources of data such as the Kenya consumer price index and monthly inflation rates for specific categories of goods and income groups from Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) and Central Bank of Kenya (CBK). However, these two sources were too broad in their analysis and therefore could not be useful to us. In the end, a comparison was done between the prices reported last year (2013) and 2012 findings on the cost of selected items in the households' 'food baskets'. Through this comparison, we were able to estimate the price changes, as illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3: Food price changes in Mukuru and Lango Baya

Food Item	Cost in 2012 in Ksh.	Cost in 2013 in Ksh.		Estimated size of change
		Mukuru	Lango Baya	
Maize flour (2kg)	80	100–120	95–130	19–62 percent increase
Milk (half litre)	35	45–55	55	28–57 percent increase
Bread (whole)	45	45–55	-	0–22 percent increase
A bunch of kales/spinach	5	5	10	Same as previous year but quantity is reduced
Tomatoes	5	Seasonal	Seasonal	Price changes depend with the season
A sachet of cooking fat/oil	5	5–10	-	Quantity sold in the same sachet has significantly reduced but no price changes

Source: Field data (Mukuru and Lango Baya), 2013

The analysis of the results in Table 3 show that the prices of most food items increased in the previous year. Even for vegetables and cooking fat/oil where no price changes were reported, in real value the price of these commodities increased because of the reduced quantities sold. A forty-four-year-old housewife in a household discussion in Mukuru noted the following:

The traders are taking advantage. They are selling to us three sticks of kales for five shillings. We now buy kales worth one hundred shillings to be enough for the family. Initially we were buying kales worth fifty shillings.

Maize which is milled/processed to make maize flour (*unga*) is very important in the daily Kenyan meal. Maize has a per capita consumption level of 77.2kg per year and at the same time comprises a large proportion of the expenditure of lower income groups.¹⁵ An increase in maize prices translates to increased prices of *unga*, thereby affecting food security and leading to escalated poverty levels. In Lango Baya where farming takes place, albeit under low and unreliable rainfall, residents plant maize and during good harvests they mill this maize to *unga*. During this time, they are not very vulnerable to *unga* price changes in the market. However in Mukuru, where no farming takes place, most have to buy the processed *unga* from the shops. In this regard, the residents of Mukuru are much more vulnerable to *unga* price changes than their counterparts in Lango Baya. One respondent in Lango Baya observed the following:

The price of maize flour varies with the harvests. When harvests are good here, the price of maize flour goes down. On the other hand, I don't understand what happens when the harvests are bad because the price automatically rises. We think that the shopkeepers and suppliers often know that the harvests are not good, and that people will buy maize flour at any price.

Thirty-eight year old unemployed woman in Lango Baya.

The cost of milk increased significantly in the previous year as shown in Table 3. The main cause of the increase was the new VAT Act, previous versions of which had exempted milk and other food commodities from taxation. As the law became operational in September 2013, at the point at which we started collecting data in Mukuru, the highest prices of milk were recorded at this time. However, as recounted earlier in the report, the law was later amended, and this brought down the price of milk again. Early in 2014, a half-litre packet of milk was retailing at Ksh. 45, which is still higher than the price recorded in 2012. In Lango Baya, most respondents prefer to buy milk from those that rear cows in the community. During the interviews, they reported buying half a litre of milk at Ksh. 25, an increase from Ksh. 20, which was the cost of the same in the previous year.

Bread is a luxury to the majority in both Mukuru and Lango Baya. Only a few who are considered better off can afford to have tea and bread for breakfast. As indicated in Table 3, the price has significantly increased, leaving people with no choice but to look for substitutes. For example, respondents in Mukuru reported eating *mandazi* (a kind of doughnut) which cost Ksh. 5 each and left over *ugali* with tea for breakfast as opposed to buying bread. In Lango Baya, out of ten household discussions, only two reported having tea with bread for breakfast. Six households reported taking porridge for breakfast while two had no breakfast at all. Porridge is preferred because it can be taken without sugar and milk, unlike tea. However, this porridge is of low quality because the flour used to prepare it does not contain sorghum and other 'flour mixes' which are more nutritious, but is prepared using the same maize flour used in preparing *ugali*.

Meat was also rarely mentioned as part of the food items that the respondents usually consume. This was also reported as luxury to them. A fifty-eight-year-old woman in a focus group discussion with farmers in Lango Baya noted the following:

¹⁵ (World Bank, 2013)

Don't include meat in this discussion because people don't buy meat here. But sometimes we eat fish from the river. We also don't buy rice here. Rice is also eaten during Christmas or New Year. We have big families and even 2kgs of rice cannot be enough for all of us. We also keep goats and chicken but we don't eat them often. We only slaughter a goat or a chicken when we have a visitor.

Other non-food items that have not been included in Table 3 but were mentioned by respondents are pesticides and diesel (used for pumping water for irrigation) in Lango Baya and kerosene, charcoal, rent, water and toilet facilities in Mukuru. Five focus groups, six households and two key informant discussions in Mukuru revealed that the price of kerosene and charcoal had increased as well but we could not correctly establish by how much due to the irregularity of the responses given. The same applied to pesticides, diesel, rent, water, and toilet facilities.¹⁶ When it came to rent in Mukuru, it was evident that the price had increased regardless of the state and location of the house. Usually, the cheapest houses are those constructed near the river, and as at September 2013, the rent was between Ksh. 1,500–1,800 per month. This was without electricity charges, water and toilet facilities. Toilet charges were also reported to have increased. A key informant observed the following:

[T]ake for example the toilet we used to pay 3 shillings and in some areas it could go as low as 2 shillings, and now we are paying the least 5 shillings and in some areas you could pay up to 10 shillings for every visit made. Yet these people are not adding any more services. People who cannot afford the 5 shillings per visit have had to make amends. They will ask their children to use a polythene paper and in the night they will throw it on top of other peoples' roofs or put it together with other household disposals.

WHAT ARE PEOPLE EATING NOW?

The analysis from Table 4 shows that *ugali* and vegetables is the main/staple food for respondents in both Mukuru and Lango Baya. Fish is unaffordable to the majority and is only consumed by a few who are better off. Most respondents are also not taking milk, the majority in Mukuru are taking black tea for breakfast while in Lango Baya most consume white porridge. In most cases, this porridge is cooked without milk or sugar. Only very few can afford to have tea with milk and bread for breakfast in both sites. Rice is also not commonly eaten. Finally, a high number of respondents, particularly in Mukuru, are skipping lunch.

MUKURU

In Mukuru, all respondents, especially in the household discussions argued that they are not eating well this year compared to last year. Their diets and food habits have changed in a variety of ways. Firstly, people are eating almost the same type of food every day and this is usually *Ugali* and kales. One respondent made the following observation:

The high prices of commodities have meant that we live on the same meals. We cannot change. As you know, it is not easy for people to have the same meals every day, but if you have to choose between not having any meal at all and having the same meal as you had the previous day, you would prefer to eat. Last year, if I had a thousand shillings, I would buy many things. Currently a thousand shillings is nothing.

Fifty-four-year-old man, scrap metal dealer in Mukuru.

¹⁶ In Mukuru, toilet and bathroom facilities are shared and charged per use. The average cost of using a toilet facility and/or a bathroom is currently Ksh. 5. It therefore means that every time a resident uses the toilet or bathroom, he/she has to incur this cost. Most are unable to keep up with the cost of these basic facilities. Instead, they take baths inside their rooms; go for short calls along the walls and pathways of the slum and others, especially children, use polythene bags to wrap up their solid human waste which is disposed with the rest of the house/kitchen waste.

Table 4: Types of food consumed in Mukuru and Lango Baya

Mukuru		Lango Baya	
Type of food	Number of households consuming it	Type of food	Number of households consuming it
Ugali and kales (sukuma wiki)	9	Ugali and traditional vegetables	10
Ugali and small fish/ omena	3	Ugali and fish	1
Black tea/ tea without milk	6	White porridge	7
Tea (with milk) and bread	2	Tea (with milk) and bread	2
Rice	3	Rice and beans	2
Skips meals, particularly lunch	15	Skips meals, including breakfast	4

Source: Field data in Mukuru and Lango Baya, 2013

Secondly, people are eating reduced/less portions of food than they were eating last year. As one respondent noted:

We are not eating well because we have very little food during our meals. We do not get satisfied; we eat very little food to ensure that everyone gets something to eat. We have even reduced the amount of food that we buy. If we used to buy a 2kg pack of maize flour last year, this year we buy 1kg and use it well for it to last us two meals.

Fifty-two-year-old woman, roasts and sells groundnuts in Mukuru.

Thirdly, people are skipping meals much more this year than last year. One twenty-four-year-old unemployed male youth argued that:

Nothing has changed much. What I can say has changed is the frequency of skipping lunch. Last year, we could skip two or three lunch meals in a week. This year, we skip almost all lunch meals.

Fourthly, respondents are now substituting some types of food deemed to be expensive with others which are less expensive. One respondent narrated her experience:

I cannot afford to eat a balanced diet so my concern is to fill the stomach. Bread has become so expensive that I would rather boil rice and take it with tea. I cannot even remember the last time my family took tea with milk. The other day my daughter and son who are in primary school were asking me why is it that they don't carry bread or snacks for break to school as they did before.

Forty-year-old-mother and a fish vendor in Mukuru.

Lastly in Mukuru, respondents are not only substituting food types but they are also doing away completely with certain types of food which they like but can no longer afford this year. Meat is one of these food items, as one respondent noted:

I feel that my household ate better last year compared to this year. For example, last year we could afford to eat meat but for the whole of this year we have never eaten meat.

Fifty-seven-year-old unemployed woman in Mukuru.

LANGO BAYA

The situation is a bit different in Lango Baya. This is because the majority of the residents are farmers and they have the option of getting food from their farms, unlike Mukuru residents who have to buy all their food requirements. Although most depend on subsistence rain-fed agriculture (with highly unreliable rainfall), in the past few years, irrigation projects have helped improve the food situation of those farming near river Galana. The year 2013, however, came with its own challenges. First, the area did not receive as much rainfall as anticipated, leading to poor harvests. In addition, the area experienced some floods in early March that swept away most of the crops that were planted along the river. In October as we were conducting the interviews, the area was at least experiencing some short rains.

Out of ten household discussions, six households reported that they were not eating well this year compared to last year; three reported no changes in what they were eating while one household felt that they were eating better this year than last year. Also, as a way of adjusting, just like in Mukuru, respondents are eating the same type of meals (*ugali* and traditional vegetables), substituting food types, skipping meals and eating reduced portions of food. One respondent in a focus group with farmers observed that:

Last year, one would take a cup of tea twice a day but nowadays we don't even take tea. This has been substituted with porridge (made with white maize flour and nothing else). Tea requires milk and sugar and these two are no longer affordable.

Having the same food over and over makes one dislike the food but is forced to have it anyway. For us, it's Ugali and cassava leaves. We do not enjoy that meal, but we eat it because we do not have an alternative.

Thirty-eight-year-old unemployed housewife in Lango Baya.

One respondent who reported no changes in what his household was eating argued that:

What we are consuming is what we were consuming last year. Some of the household members say that beans and green grams are not good for their stomachs but they still eat. We are still eating well.

Sixty-year-old man who runs a shop in Malanga high school, Lango Baya.

Only one respondent argued that his household was eating better compared to last year, and he noted the following:

My family is much better now. We have planted some traditional vegetables by the river, unlike last year where I used to buy all the vegetables we need from the local grocery. It has eased some burden off our shoulders.

Forty-six-year-old father and farmer in Lango Baya.

5 LOCAL ACCOUNTABILITY FOR FOOD SECURITY/HUNGER

We chose to focus on accountability because recent price spikes and ‘food crises’ have drawn attention to the politics of food, raising questions about what the right to food means in practice; who bears the responsibility to protect it; and how such a right is enforced. Yet, hunger and food security remain immune from the demands of accountability in other sectors of development. The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food recently noted that despite much progress towards tackling hunger and food security since the 2008 food crisis, most initiatives fail the accountability test: few have mechanisms for monitoring, for redress or for participation in policymaking by small producers or consumers (De Schutter 2014).

In addition, we wanted to contribute to the growing debate about how to secure greater accountability against hunger by documenting how accountability functions (or not) in local systems of food provisioning. The nature of our research meant that we were in a unique position to contribute by hearing what people on low and precarious incomes had to say on the matter. Our approach was to unearth and compare what rights to food mean to different people in different settings. In practice, this meant focusing on the programmes and policies that were visible in communities: social protection (food or cash transfer) schemes or subsidies for agriculture.

AWARENESS OF RIGHTS TO FOOD

Most respondents in both Mukuru and Lango Baya demonstrated high levels of awareness of rights to food. They acknowledged that everyone has a right to food. This awareness has partly been ignited by the passing of a new constitution in 2010. This was made possible through civic education conducted before the passing of the constitution and general elections held in March 2013. The constitution of Kenya 2010 is very progressive in terms of recognizing the rights of the poor and marginalized, for example the right to food, through the bill of rights and other socioeconomic rights expressed in the constitution. However, these bills/articles of the constitution are yet to be operationalized. No ministry or government agency has so far been charged with implementing the right to food for example. Therefore, even though most respondents acknowledged that all Kenyans had a right to food, they were not aware of any institution or agency from which they could claim these rights. For example, one respondent in a focus group discussion with men observed the following:

The government has that mandate to feed its citizens, but to whom do you address, even if the chief is the government’s representative here, he also has problems of his own to address. After all, people have always known that one must work to eat. So, claiming to government to feed you will most likely not work.

Forty-year-old juakali (informal sector) artisan.

Very few respondents from both sites demonstrated a lack of awareness of rights to food. For example, a sixty-year-old woman and farmer in Lango Baya noted the following:

Hungry people in this community do not have rights to food. One must only eat their sweat and if they don’t work then they should not eat. Without work, where would you get

food from? About the sick and those who are unable to work, it's the responsibility of their relatives to take care of them and give them food.

INSTITUTIONS RESPONSIBLE FOR PROTECTING PEOPLE FROM HUNGER

The data that we collected in both sites showed that the government, local and international non-government organizations (NGOs), churches and individuals/community members were all considered to be responsible for ensuring food security in each of the local areas.

Analysis of the results in Table 5 show that the government is perceived to be most responsible for protecting people against hunger, followed by NGOs and local churches. For the government, this responsibility is considered an official mandate. One respondent in Mukuru observed that:

It's the role of government to ensure that its people eat well. It should protect the people from hunger. It is why it's called the government. It should help the people that it leads. Otherwise it won't have anyone to lead.

Fifty-six-year-old woman, household head who sells chips and vegetables in Mukuru.

We pay taxes on everything we buy, and we elected them. They have a responsibility to ensure that the poor and hungry are taken care of.

Forty-eight-year-old woman and a farmer in Lango Baya.

Table 5: Institutions and/or persons considered to be responsible for protecting people from hunger

Mukuru		Lango Baya	
Institutions considered to be responsible for ensuring food security	Frequency	Institutions considered to be responsible for ensuring food security	Frequency
Government	13	Government	14
NGOs	6	NGOs	11
Churches	4	Churches	1
Parents	2	Parents	2
Community members/individuals	1	Community members/individuals	1

Source: Field data from Mukuru and Lango Baya, 2013

For the NGOs, respondents argued that they should help the hungry because they have the money which they get from donors for such purposes, and because they are also able to relate to the poor. According to the respondents, churches should help because they have many followers who have enough money to contribute and help those who are hungry and poor. Other respondents argued that it is the primary responsibility of parents to provide for their children and that community members also need to be good neighbours to each other by helping those who may not have food.

According to the respondents, the government should take the following actions to promote food security in the two sites:

- Take count of or identify all the hungry people and ensure that they are provided with food;
- Make food available and affordable, even if it means buying the same food from other countries;
- Use the idle land that it owns to grow food and feed the entire nation;
- Use the resources it has to distribute food from rich agricultural areas like central province to dry areas like Lango Baya;
- Reduce food prices so that each and every person can afford;
- Create jobs (particularly for the youth) so that people are able to purchase food and other necessities like taking their children to school without waiting for sponsorships;
- Facilitate people to do irrigation that will improve yields, particularly in Lango Baya so that everyone can have sufficient food;
- Supply good planting materials to farmers particularly in Lango Baya and educate them on best farming practices so as to ensure maximum production on small pieces of land;
- Expand the cash transfer programme for the sick and elderly in the country.

NGOs, on the other hand, should take the following actions to promote food security in Mukuru and Lango Baya:

- Keep the government on its toes as it takes a long time to respond to the problems of the people;
- Write proposals to donors so as to secure funds;
- Use responsibly the funds they get from donors to feed the hungry;
- Take count of hungry people and ensure that they are provided for;
- Educate farmers and mobilize for funds and other resources which can help farmers have access to good seeds and pesticides;
- Educate community members about entrepreneurial/business opportunities available so that they can make a living out of this and cater for their food as well as other needs.

Churches, on the other hand, should mobilize food and cash from their followers and re-distribute this to those who are hungry and poor in their communities.

Although respondents acknowledged that it is the responsibility of the institutions mentioned in the preceding discussion to promote food security, they were not satisfied with their performance so far. In both sites, respondents felt that what the government was doing in terms of relief food/food aid to the hungry and vulnerable was just a drop in the ocean.¹⁷ The food that the government had distributed in the past year (2013) in Mukuru was not only unpredictable but also very little. In a whole year, for example, relief food could be distributed only once or twice.

The situation is similar in Lango Baya, with government distributing very little food over long periods of time. Respondents in this area made it clear that they could not rely on the government as it was highly unreliable. A seventy-five-year-old woman who is a farmer and casual labourer in Lango Baya noted the following:

¹⁷ In Kenya, emergency food aid/relief food dominates social assistance by government. The food aid is usually in response to drought or floods and in the form of school feeding programs, mostly in the arid and semi arid areas of the country. These programs jointly absorb over 80% of all safety net beneficiaries, and make up over half of all safety net spending (World Bank, 2013).

Early this year (2013), I received some food assistance from the chief's office. I and my husband were identified as needy and therefore qualified to get this kind of help. When I went there, I was given 4kg of maize and 1kg of beans. That is all I have received this year.

NGOs and churches are considered much more reliable in comparison to government by the respondents in both sites. In Mukuru for example, Winners' Chapel, St. Bhakita and St. Catherine's (both faith-based organizations) were reported to give food and drugs weekly to the sick, particularly those infected with HIV/AIDS, and to the elderly. In Lango Baya, ActionAid, which has now moved from the area, was reported to have impacted positively on the lives of many in the area. The Catholic Church in Lango Baya was also assisting orphans and vulnerable children with food, clothing and education in a dependable manner. For example, primary school-going children were given 4kg of maize flour and 1kg of beans every Thursday. Unfortunately, these interventions by NGOs and churches only reach a small minority of the total population who are in need of them.

In both sites, it was clear that the respondents were not aware of any monitoring of food security/hunger situation by government or any other institution that they perceived to be responsible for ensuring food security in the local areas. In addition, institutions have not been held to account when there have been episodes of local food insecurity/hunger. The respondents however reported that some kind of monitoring was put in place to oversee the distribution of relief food, particularly by government in the local areas. In Mukuru for example, when the chief is distributing relief food, there are two or more administration police officers in sight to keep order. Representatives or officers from the District Officer's office are also present and take photos of the process and the bags carrying this food have a label/tag showing that the food is not for sale. The chief answers to the District Officer whose role is to ensure that relief food gets to the designated areas. The same standards are applied country-wide, even in Lango Baya. The chief is assisted by village elders who identify the needy people in the community. Sometimes the government can distribute relief food to all and other times it targets only those who are needy (sick and very poor).

However, this does not mean that the process of food distribution has been free of corruption in both areas. A forty-year-old woman who sells fish in Mukuru observed the following:

No one will tell you that food aid can be found in this particular place. One must struggle to get it. After the general elections in March 2013, some cooking fat and rice was brought by the government for the sick people. It was distributed at the chief's office. I saw some administration police carry up to four boxes of cooking fat per person while the sick had to be given only one box of the same to be shared among four people. You cannot report because they will not give you anything the next time some food is brought.

A thirty-three-year-old trader in Lango Baya argued that:

Sanctions are only said, and no action is taken. Sometime back, we had this village elder that had the habit of keeping most of the relief food then later sells. We reported him, but nothing was done. It was only after the chief was changed that our voice was heard. He was immediately removed and we elected another.

Respondents argued that they had no way of monitoring the work of NGOs and churches. They however thought that the two institutions had some sort of internal monitoring and internal sanctions. One farmer in Lango Baya noted the following:

We don't know about these NGOs and how they operate. When someone comes and gives you help, you cannot start asking them questions about their work. Who would you report to? We hear that their headquarters are far in Nairobi.

CONCLUSIONS

Accountability in local governance of food insecurity/hunger is weak in the local areas targeted by this research. There are no adequate measures put in place by government, for example, to help in the monitoring of the hunger/food security situation in these specific areas. What is available is very broad in terms of coverage such as the food security assessments by livelihoods zone. Even when such assessments are done, serious interventions to curb food insecurity in the areas have not been implemented. No individual or government agency or institution has so far been held to account where there have been episodes of food insecurity or hunger.

Mostly, the government and other non-governmental institutions, including the private sector, have in the past responded to hunger through raising funds that help in the provision of emergency food aid. This food aid is usually given in response to droughts or floods. In addition, school feeding programs are a common type of food assistance especially in the arid and semi-arid regions of the country. However, support through emergency food aid, while important, is sporadic, unpredictable and ineffective in reducing chronic poverty. The efforts by NGOs and churches in the local areas, though positive, have not managed to reach a large majority who are greatly in need of food assistance.

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