

# Household food insecurity and coping strategies among small scale farmers in Tharaka central division, Kenya

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Food insecurity is a major development problem that is caused by myriad of factors in the global, regional, national and local spheres of human life. Several efforts have been put in place to alleviate food insecurity globally, nationally and even locally. Despite these efforts, the situation continues to prevail and sometimes even increase in the contemporary human society. It is therefore imperative that food insecurity gets addressed appropriately. Small scale farmers play a vital role in food production especially through subsistent farming. However, their households are major casualties of food insecurity despite their efforts in food production. This study sought to investigate household food insecurity and coping strategies among small scale farmers in Tharaka Central Division of Tharaka South District, Kenya. The specific objectives of the study were to: Establish the status of household food production among small scale farmers in Tharaka Central Division; determine household food consumption patterns; establish household food sources, establish the status of household food insecurity and identify coping strategies among the households in the event of food shortage. The research design employed in the study was cross sectional descriptive survey which sought to obtain information that was to describe the existing status of household food insecurity and coping strategies among the small scale farmers. A total of 351 small scale farmers' households were systematically sampled from the total population of 3631 small scale farming households in the division. Data was collected by use of structured questionnaire, observation checklist and key informant interview guide. Data analysis was done using SPSS (Version 11.5) computer software program. Frequency tables, pie charts, bar graphs and line graphs are used to present the findings of the study. Mean farmland sizes was 1.62 acres, food crops were cultivated at 95% of the total crop, the major months of adequate and inadequate food provisioning were June to August (40.5%) and October to January (30.2%) respectively. Crop loss was mitigated by planting drought resistant crops. Household dietary diversity score (HDDS) of the previous 24 hours was low (83.3%) while 50.7% had acceptable household food consumption score (HFCS) in the previous 7 days of food consumption. The primary source of maize was the market at 36.7%. Majority of households (44.7%) were food insecure, 43.3% vulnerable to food insecurity and 12% food secure. Reduction in size of meals was the major coping strategy. There were significant positive relationships between sizes of farms and sizes of farmlands ( $r = 0.653, p=0.000$ ); between HFCS and farmland size ( $r=0.299, p=0.0000$ ); significant difference between maize expected and maize harvested ( $t=22.927, p=0.000$ ). There was also significant positive association between HDDS and HFCS ( $t=13.463, df=4$  and  $p=0.0091$ ). sources of maize and the statuses of household food insecurity ( $\chi^2=60.895, df= 6, p=0.000$ ). Low food characterized by low HDDS, and coping strategies

were not detrimental to developed through community-based participatory actions; and the GOK through implement them in all ASAL areas to alleviate household food insecurity.