

# Food Security in Kisumu: A Call for Greater Engagement in the Urban Food System

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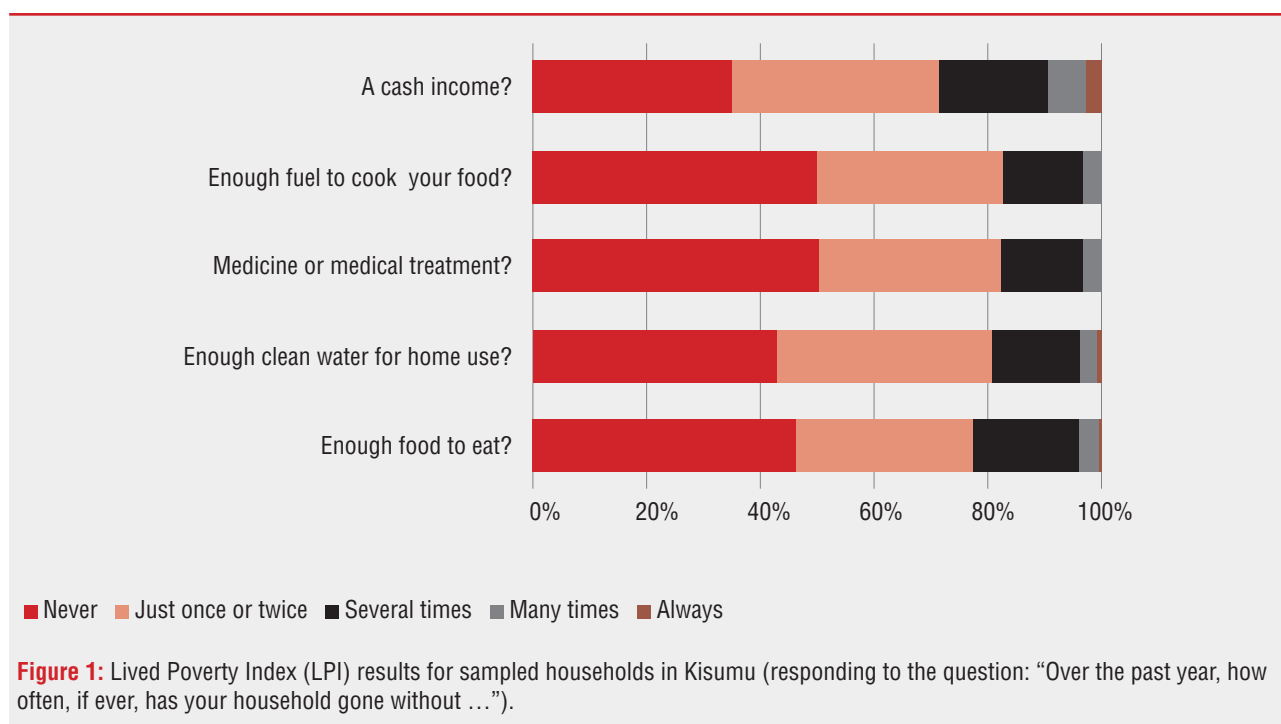


This project briefing note is informed by the findings of the ESRC/DFID-funded Consuming Urban Poverty project (formally called “Governing Food Systems to Alleviate Poverty in Secondary Cities in Africa”). Work in Kisumu was conducted in 2016-2017 and generated data on food security, food systems and governance. The implications of the project’s findings are presented here.

This brief is targeted at non-governmental organisations and other actors outside government. It ends with policy suggestions. As suggestions, these are in no way prescriptive and readers may wish to generate their own responses informed by their own organisational mandates.

**Household poverty and food insecurity:** The Consuming Urban Poverty food security survey found high levels of

poverty in Kisumu, the third largest city in Kenya. While income poverty is high across the city, lived poverty is multidimensional, the project argues. It therefore used the Lived Poverty Index (LPI) as a measure of poverty. According to the LPI, deprivation was not uniform among the five LPI parameters: insufficient food affecting 53.6%; not enough clean water for home use affecting 57%; lack of medicine or medical treatment affecting 49.7%; not enough fuel to cook household food affecting 50.1%; and lack of cash income affecting 64.9%. Of the LPI parameters, income poverty at 64.9% was the highest and most critical, given that households in the city depend mainly on food purchased from the market. The LPI also indicates that poverty is higher in the peri-urban neighbourhoods than in inner-city neighbourhoods.



**Figure 1:** Lived Poverty Index (LPI) results for sampled households in Kisumu (responding to the question: “Over the past year, how often, if ever, has your household gone without ...”).

The household food security survey made use of the Food and Nutrition Technical Assistance (FANTA) tools developed by USAid. These tools have different measurement modules: the Household Food Insecurity Access Scale (HFIAS), the Household Food Insecurity Access Prevalence (HFIAP) scale, the Months of Adequate Household Food Provisioning (MAHFP) indicator and the Household Dietary Diversity Score (HDDS). Each provides useful insights into the state of household food security and, when combined and read together, further nuances are evident. According to the HFIAP, 71.3% of sampled households were either moderately food insecure (26.3%) or severely food insecure (45%), implying a high prevalence of food insecurity in Kisumu. Further, nearly 86% of sampled households had a dietary diversity score of six and less, where less than six is a proxy for malnutrition. The MAHFP scores appeared, on initial review, to indicate less concern at the household level about food security issues. While there are monthly differences, the average reported MAHFP for Kisumu indicated that only 27% of the households considered their monthly food access to be constrained. When read with the high levels of food insecurity (as measured by the HFIAP) and dietary diversity (measured by the HDDS), this offered an explanation as to why food and wider food insecurity is not a significant political issue. Food insecurity appears to have been normalised where the diet is limited to key staples, made up mostly of *ugali* (74% of households) and *sukuma wiki* (78% of households). This appears to be largely informed by the levels of poverty and the need to pay other household expenses, resulting in less resources being allocated to food purchases. However, the situation poses very real nutrition and development challenges.

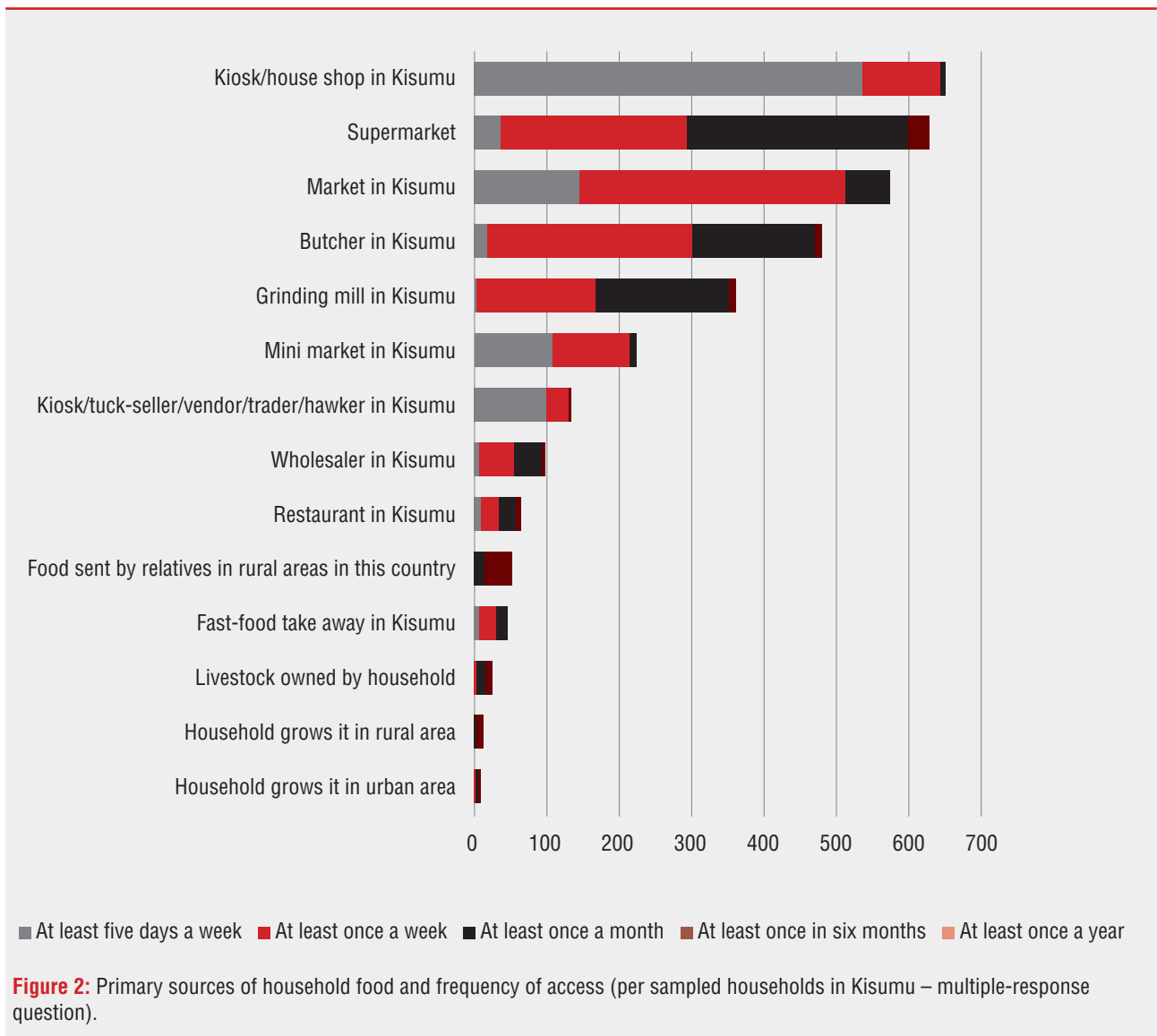
Food security was found to be linked to a variety of aspects, not just the availability and accessibility of affordable food. The intersection between urban food insecurity and other aspects associated with urban life require far greater levels of enquiry and research. Significant questions relating to levels of food insecurity were raised by other findings. One such finding was that of dwelling types. The survey found that 39% of sampled households lived in single rooms, including sublet rooms in both middle-income settlements and informal settlements. These single-room residents often lack water, electricity and food storage and food preservation facilities (such as refrigeration), which shape food choice and therefore food security.

**Sources of food in Kisumu:** Kisumu city depends on distant sources of food supplies, often transported via poor road

networks, with middlemen playing a major role in food distribution and marketing. Production sources of five key food items – *ugali*, fish, green vegetables, porridge and eggs – in Kenya are mostly located between 75km and 150km away from Kisumu, and some of these foods are imported. Of particular interest is that, despite Kisumu's proximity to Lake Victoria, fish is imported from countries as distant as China. Dependent on seasonality and other factors such as pricing, eggs sold in Kisumu are often sourced from Uganda, linked in part to Ugandan agricultural and subsidy programmes.

**Household food access:** Informality is the main game in town and has become a permanent feature of the food system. Despite being viewed by authorities as a nuisance, informal traders were the source of daily food purchases for 75% of sampled households. More than 50% of sampled food retail outlets exist outside the formally-zoned market space. The recent expansion of supermarkets has not undermined the viability of informal trade. Informal traders have their segment of clients with whom they have built longstanding relationships. Households use diverse food-access strategies and are highly strategic in food-access decisions. Households make use of designated municipal markets but also access markets and kiosks in their neighbourhoods. The use of neighbourhood retail is a strategic choice that enables food access with reduced associated transport costs. Despite government and non-governmental organisations' promotion of urban agriculture as a food security response, 85.5% of sampled households do not grow any of their food in the city. This points to the insignificance of urban agriculture as a source of food.

**Food processing, distribution and marketing:** Food processing industries have not grown in Kisumu, when compared to other cities in Kenya. There are sugar and rice milling plants in the satellite towns of Kibos, Miwani and Muhoroni, and a maize milling plant and a fish processing factory within Kisumu. However, these have not made a major impact on the food security situation. Smaller food processing enterprises are involved in small-scale food preservation and packaging, mostly targeting the local market. Road transport is the main means through which food reaches Kisumu city. After stock purchases, transport accounts for the greatest share of operating costs of food retailers (82% of respondents). Fresh foods account for a greater proportion of all foods traded by the sampled informal retailers (58%). Spoilage is the second highest cost after transport (51% of cases), associated with inadequate infrastructure for food preservation and storage.



## Policy Issues

Kisumu’s food and nutritional security challenges call for greater engagement in the food system by county and national governments, city management and civil society actors. Immediate areas of policy focus should include:

**Food at the centre of development:** The high levels of food insecurity present a significant and potentially inter-generational development challenge. Past development plans that assumed that growing sufficient food (availability) would address food security challenges are clearly not delivering the requisite development impact. Food needs to be at the centre of urban development and social assistance programmes. The scale where the impact of such programmes appears to be most needed is the urban scale, in this case, Kisumu city.

**Embrace the informal economy:** The informal economy appears to be the primary source of food for most Kisumu residents, through the approved market areas as well as street vendors. All typologies of food vending play a critical role in enabling food access, particularly for the food insecure in Kisumu. Embracing the informal food sector implies more than acceptance, but also the provision of facilities such as adequate water, sanitation and storage facilities.

**Infrastructure and services:** Policy should place food on the agenda of city infrastructural planning, including provision of fresh-produce markets with adequate food storage and preservation facilities, improvement of road transport networks, and integrated planning of food retail sites and transport nodes. The provision of affordable housing with requisite services also links directly to improved food security. The concept of food-sensitive urban design is an emerging trend and one that could prove a useful tool in ensuring a food-security-oriented planning response.

**Governance of the food system:** City and county-level policy should aim to better understand the influence of middlemen, open up the market for local produce, and support informal food traders by creating an enabling environment for compliance and requisite food hygiene and safety requirements.

**Food production and agro-processing:** Given the high cost of food in Kisumu associated with distant supply sources, the promotion of food production in neighbouring districts, urban and peri-urban agriculture, and agro-processing industries could help improve the food and nutritional security of households by improving physical access to food and creating job opportunities for the youthful population. This approach needs to pay particular attention to how this food gets to the residents of Kisumu. Assuming that if food is grown it will address food security is a folly that is in part the cause of the current high levels of food insecurity in Kisumu.



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