

APRIL 2020

The Politics of Information and Analysis in Humanitarian Emergencies

Evidence from Kenya

A FEINSTEIN INTERNATIONAL CENTER PUBLICATION

Daniel Maxwell, Peter Hailey, Lindsay Spainhour Baker, and Stephen Odhiambo



Tufts
UNIVERSITY
FRIEDMAN SCHOOL OF
NUTRITION SCIENCE AND POLICY
Feinstein
International Center



EARF

EAST AFRICA
RESEARCH FUND

Cover photo: Joyce Maxwell

Citation: Daniel Maxwell, Peter Hailey, Lindsay Spainhour Baker, and Stephen Odhiambo. "The Politics of Information and Analysis in Humanitarian Emergencies: Evidence from Kenya." Boston: Feinstein International Center, Tufts University, 2020.

Corresponding author: Daniel Maxwell

Corresponding author email: daniel.maxwell@tufts.edu

Photo credits: Joyce Maxwell

Copyright 2020 Tufts University, all rights reserved.
"Tufts University" is a registered trademark and may not be reproduced apart from its inclusion in this work without permission from its owner.

**Feinstein International Center,
Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy
Tufts University**

75 Kneeland Street, 8th Floor

Boston, MA 02111 USA

Tel: +1 617.627.3423

Twitter: @FeinsteinIntCen

fic.tufts.edu

Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the financial support of the DFID/East Africa Research Fund (EARF) for this study, the Feinstein International Center and the Centre for Humanitarian Change for their logistical support, and the efforts of the internal review committee at EARF as well as two external reviewers for their feedback. We are grateful to Joyce Maxwell for copy editing.

This document is an output from a project funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) through the Research for Evidence Division (RED) for the benefit of developing countries. However, the views expressed and information contained in it are not necessarily those of or endorsed by DFID, which can accept no responsibility for such views or information or for any reliance placed on them.

The Authors
Nairobi, Kenya
April 2020



Contents

1. Introduction	7
2. Recent drought-related crises	8
3. Humanitarian information and analysis	10
4. Methodological note	13
5. Data challenges	14
Data quality and timeliness	14
Missing or limited data	14
Early warning and hotspots	15
Hazards	15
Data sharing	16
6. Analytical challenges	17
Analytical process	17
7. Influences on analysis	18
Participation, leadership, and management	18
Politics of hunger and food insecurity	18
8. Conclusions: Lessons learned and recommendations	20
Lessons learned	20
Recommendations	21
References	22

Acronyms

ALRMP	Arid Lands Resource Management Project
ASAL	arid and semi-arid lands
DHIS2	District Health Information System (2)
DISK	Data and Information Subcommittee of KFSSG
ECHO	European Commission Office of Humanitarian Assistance and Civil Protection
EW	early warning
EW/EA	early warning/early action
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FEWS NET	Famine Early Warning Network
FSNMS	Food Security and Nutrition Monitoring Survey
GAM	global acute malnutrition
GOK	Government of Kenya
HSNP	Hunger Safety Net Programme
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee for Humanitarian Response
IBLI	index-based livestock insurance
ICHA	International Centre for Humanitarian Affairs (Kenya Red Cross)
IDP	internally displaced person
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
IPC	Integrated Food Security Phase Classification
KFSM	Kenya Food Security Meeting
KFSSG	Kenya Food Security Steering Group
LRA	long rains assessment
MUAC	mid-upper arm circumference
NACOSTI	National Commission on Science, Technology, and Innovation
NDMA	National Drought Management Authority
NGO	non-governmental organization
NITWG	Nutrition Information Technical Working Group
SMART	Standardized Monitoring and Assessment of Relief and Transitions
SRA	short rains assessment
TDCPU	Turkana Drought Contingency Planning Unit
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
USAID	US Agency for International Development
WASH	water, sanitation, and hygiene
WFP	World Food Programme

1. Introduction

This study examines the availability and quality of information and the complexities and constraints of analysis for contemporary food-security and nutrition emergency information systems in Kenya. Four main questions drive the research: The first is about the availability and quality of data, chronic “gaps” in data, and why those gaps persist. The second is about the constraints or influences on information collection and analysis of humanitarian emergencies. The third is about the way in which missing or unreliable information is managed and the impact of missing information. And the fourth is about processes for information management, and how influences on collecting and analyzing information that predict severe humanitarian emergencies are

managed, and documenting the good practices that emerge. This report provides a brief summary of the recent history of food-security crises in Kenya followed by a review of the humanitarian information and analysis processes specific to Kenya. Thereafter, the responses from 43 key informants to the above research questions are analyzed and categorized with regard to data challenges, analytical challenges, or influences on humanitarian analysis in Kenya. Following the analysis, the report documents lessons learned and offers recommendations for ways to improve humanitarian food-security and nutrition data collection and analysis in Kenya.

2. Recent drought-related crises

Kenya is not considered a famine-risk country and has not suffered from famine in recent times.¹ The most recent evidence of actual famine comes from the nineteenth century, reported in the relatively heavily populated, semi-arid area of Ukambani—contemporary Machakos, Kitui and Makueni counties (Mbithi and Wisner 1972, Jackson 1976, Akong’ a and Kareithi 1998). However, the northern and eastern drylands, the arid and semi-arid lands (ASAL) parts of the country, continue to be subject to periodic drought usually with attending humanitarian consequences. Large drought-related emergencies struck Kenya, as well as other countries in the region, in 1984, 1991, 1999–2000, 2005–06, 2010–11, and 2016–17 (among other years—those were the major ones in recent times). In contemporary terms each of these droughts put at least some of the affected population into IPC Phase 4 conditions—and perhaps an unmeasured very tiny proportion in Phase 5 conditions.²

The long experience with drought-related emergencies led to an effort by the Government of Kenya (GOK) and donors in the 1990s to treat the problem systemically rather than on the basis of one-off humanitarian emergencies. The Arid Lands Resource Management Project started with donor funding in the 1990s and was managed by the GOK. Among other tasks, it monitored the food-security situation under what eventually came to be known as the

¹ Much of the literature on famine in Kenya conflates “famine” with “drought.” Broadly speaking, drought refers to insufficient rainfall (though its definition may be context specific); famine means an acute crisis of insufficient access to adequate food—usually associated with increased malnutrition and mortality. Drought can be a cause of famine (or at least one cause) but they are not the same thing.

² IPC refers to the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification—a tool for measuring and comparing food-security crises across differing contexts. Phase 1 refers to no food insecurity; Phase 5 refers to famine, with increasing severity in Phases 2–4.

Kenya Food Security Steering Group (KFSSG) and its attendant oversight body, the Kenya Food Security Meeting (KFSM). The primary emphasis was the human food-security situation due to drought. However, access to water and, for pastoral populations, access to both water and grazing for their livestock were equally important.

Subsequent attempts to shape the message of drought and hunger have occurred since the early 1990s. The intervening decades have seen some back and forth over who controls information on humanitarian conditions in the drought-prone north of the country and who has the right to make declarations about that information. This back and forth primarily involves NGOs (some of which are external, but some prominent Kenyan organizations are involved as well), the government, the media, and the designated early warning and information agencies (Oxfam/Save the Children 2012).

Following the 2011 crisis, the GOK initiated a program titled “Ending Drought Emergencies” (EDE) for the ASAL areas of the country.³ Its focus was on building resilience to drought-related hazards (Carabine 2015). This program has seen significant successes, both in terms of diversifying the economy of the ASAL areas and in terms of improved information systems, linkages to early action (in the form of asset protection), and rapid response (in the form of expandable safety nets).

Since 2013, decentralization and devolution have increased responsiveness at local levels in many cases, and several national mechanisms built up in the aftermath of the 2011 drought emergency (the National Drought Contingency Fund and the Hunger Safety Net Programme) built better response capacity. The GOK routinely sets aside 2 percent of the national budget for emergency response (O11, O24)

³ Based on the Intergovernmental Authority on Development’s (IGAD) “Ending Drought Emergencies” approach.

though sometimes mobilizing those funds is difficult (024).⁴

Overall, since the 1980s, comparatively easy access to affected populations, a relatively permissive operating environment, a free press, a government-led information system, and good relations with donors all combined to prevent each of the large-scale drought emergencies in Kenya from sliding into the kinds of humanitarian disasters seen in neighboring countries. Nevertheless, until recently, it has been

common for the prevalence of acute malnutrition to climb into the 30 percent or higher range, although human mortality has never spiked the way it has in South Sudan, Ethiopia, or Somalia. The safety net, emergency response, and humanitarian information systems obviously do not prevent all malnutrition or malnutrition-related mortality, and partly as a result, the literature on the information system in Kenya is mostly devoted to technical considerations, not analysis of politicization of the information.

⁴ Numbers in parentheses refer to key informant interviews.

3. Humanitarian information and analysis

Kenya has a long-established humanitarian information system that is mostly organized around the analysis of food-security and nutrition status, with roots going back to at least the late 1970s. Some of the seminal early work on localized famine early warning systems was carried out in Kenya by the Turkana Drought Contingency Planning Unit (TDCPU) in the 1980s. This program successfully predicted and enabled an early response to drought in 1990–91. It also pioneered the scaled set of alerts still used in Kenya (normal, alert, alarm, and emergency).

The TDCPU is perhaps one of the early stories of food-security analysis systems falling victim to political influences. Buchanan-Smith and Davies (1995) noted that the TDCPU accurately forecast drought-related crises in both 1990 and 1992. In 1992 however, the district governor and the national government were both facing an election, and it was not considered a good time for any talk of “famine”—in Turkana or anywhere else. Thus, information was blocked or ignored until a very severe crisis did unfold (Buchanan-Smith 2000).

In the 1990s, the donor-funded Arid Lands Resource Management Project (ALRMP) inherited and scaled up this system to cover the arid northern and north-eastern districts of Kenya, and later to cover semi-arid areas as well. In the aftermath of a region-wide drought emergency in 2011, the ALRMP became the National Drought Management Authority (NDMA), described on its website as a government-funded body with both early warning and response functions and oversight of the social safety net for arid and semi-arid land areas.

Currently, the system is made up of the Kenya Food Security Meeting (KFSSM), which consists of high-level actors (donors, government) who take final decisions on actions. The core analysis/action component of the system is the Kenya Food Security Steering Group (KFSSG), which has effectively taken

the role that a food security and livelihoods cluster would fill in other countries. The KFSSG is led by the National Drought Management Authority (NDMA) and includes all relevant government line ministries and departments (agriculture, livestock, health, nutrition, water, etc.) as well as the main UN agencies (FAO, WFP, UNICEF) and FEWS NET. The core of the analytical capacity in KFSSG is DISK (Data and Information Sub-committee of the KFSSG, consisting of NDMA, WFP, FAO, UNICEF and FEWS NET). Kenya does not have a UN Humanitarian Country Team, and OCHA does not have a Kenya country office (the regional office covers Kenya when needed).

The early warning system is operated by NDMA in conjunction with county governments. County governments in 23 arid and semi-arid lands (ASAL) counties have played a much more significant role in the process since devolution in 2013. The EW system includes 154 sentinel sites across these 23 counties. Each site tracks 30 households per month as well as markets and interviews three-to-five key informants for specialized information. The normalized difference vegetation index (NDVI) and temperature and rainfall data are also included. Counties and NGOs often conduct mass screening exercises with MUAC, particularly when they believe the situation might be getting worse, and NDMA regularly collects MUAC data in its sentinel sites.

Nutrition information is handled through the Nutrition Information Technical Working Group (NIT-WG)—chaired by the Nutrition Unit of the Ministry of Health. It is co-chaired by UNICEF and an NGO and is made up of all agencies engaged in nutrition information—mostly but not exclusively using SMART surveys. The SMART surveys are staggered to cover periods leading up to the two major seasonal assessments led by the KFSSG, for the long rains and short rains respectively. Surveys are only conducted in counties and areas of counties that are expected to have a significant change from the previous seasonal assessment. In the larger counties

(e.g., Turkana) up to five separate surveys are conducted. So the outputs of these assessments (long rains assessment or LRA and short rains assessment or SRA) together with the SMART surveys are the main outputs that feed into the humanitarian information system in Kenya. The SMART surveys feed into seasonal assessments, but they are conducted independently. Mortality data is rarely collected in the SMART surveys. In recent years the NITWG has also started to produce a separate nutrition analysis, including a nutrition situation map, as is the practice in other countries.

Thus, the combination of information from various sources—including NDMA, DISK, and other sources like FEWS NET reports and SMART survey results—means that food-security information in Kenya is certainly adequate. The evaluation of the ECHO response to the Horn of Africa drought of 2016–17 notes that the impetus to early action was not sufficiently speedy, but the lack of information was not the cause (Grunewald et al. 2019). A similar observation is noted in the real-time evaluation conducted by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) of the humanitarian response in the 2011 Horn of Africa drought crisis (Slim 2012). However, unlike other countries, the seasonal assessments are not based primarily on a major survey undertaken in the post-harvest period. Seasonal assessments in Kenya are based on desk review of recent reports from the early warning system and field visits, interviews, and transect drives to cross-check the findings from the early warning report.

The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) method has been used for food-security classification in Kenya for several years, but the established systems have largely run on their own criteria and systems,⁵ into which IPC has until recently only been partially integrated. This changed as of mid-2019, with the long rains assessment now fully compliant with IPC protocols. The main sources of information for the IPC analysis include the seasonal assessments (SRA and LRA), but also the NDMA sentinel site surveillance information and SMART surveys where these are available—they do not cover the entire country or even the entire ASAL area and usually do not include mortality data.

The early warning information is generated by the NDMA's sentinel sites. The information is made

available in EW bulletins from NDMA, which include several current-status indicators that require some interpretation for actual early warning purposes. The NDMA uses a coding system that translates into general early warning classification: from “normal” to “alert” (meaning environmental factors like rainfall and water availability are low) to “alarm” (meaning production factors like crops and livestock are not doing well or market prices are high) to “emergency” (meaning that humanitarian outcomes are bad) and finally to “recovery” (meaning that all factors are subsiding after a bad period).

Aside from the recent initiative to more fully incorporate IPC protocols into classifying the food-security outcomes of the SRA and LRA, several other initiatives have been prominent in Kenya, including insurance-based approaches that rely on a specific trigger instead of general early warning information. These include index-based livestock insurance (IBLI) and crop insurance at the farm level. Another initiative is a disaster risk-reduction framework to model risk at a local level and amalgamate data to track hazards and outcomes. This initiative is convened by the International Centre for Humanitarian Affairs (ICHA)—a research center affiliated with Kenya Red Cross Society in collaboration with government bodies. Within nutrition and the health system, the “surge” approach is now scaling up to cover all the ASAL counties. The approach aims to allow the government health and nutrition system to scale up its service delivery in response to increased demand caused by shocks, such as drought, that have an impact on food, nutrition, health, and water security. On the early action side of the equation, a recent study found that while preparedness in Kenya is generally high, the ability of mitigation and response programs to adapt to rapidly changing conditions is still limited, and need to be more focused on achieving impact—whereas they are currently more focused on inputs and activities (Obrecht 2019).

These efforts attempt to incorporate the risks of certain hazards, particularly drought, into a “regular” business model and move away from drought as a humanitarian crisis. This has been formal policy since the “Ending Drought Emergencies” initiative was announced in 2012. While promising, these initiatives did not prevent the recurrence of a humanitarian emergency due to severe drought in 2017.

Clearly a lot of innovation and activity is happening within the humanitarian information and mitigation/response space, but there is still a need to consolidate the learning and the gains made to build on a government-led system.

There seems to be adequate dialogue and awareness of the general situation in Kenya to give key decision makers a sense of what is happening, but oversight of developing hotspots is occasional. The combi-

nation of information from the short- and long-rain assessment reports, the IPC projections, information from NDMA early warning bulletins, and other sources of information like FEWS NET reports and SMART survey results means that adequate early warning and current-status information can certainly be found in Kenya. But several issues related to information collection and analysis arose in the interviews, which are taken up below.

4. Methodological note

This study is one in a series of comparative case studies examining the availability and quality of information and the complexities and constraints of analysis. Case studies already completed include four currently famine-affected or at-risk countries: Somalia, South Sudan, Nigeria, and Yemen.⁶ The current study expands the cases to include Ethiopia and Kenya.

This report synthesizes information from a comprehensive desk review and key-informant interviews. First, the Tufts team conducted a review of the literature on crisis in Kenya. Second, a team from the Feinstein International Center and the Centre for Humanitarian Change conducted interviews, either in person or via Skype, with respondents who oversee or are directly involved in the humanitarian information and analysis system, including from the donor community, UN agencies, specialized information agencies, international and local non-governmental organizations, and members of the Government of Kenya. During these interviews, inquiries were made regarding the data collection and analysis process to attempt to identify potential gaps in upcoming analyses that might be addressed by quick donor action in advance of the next IPC analysis. The interviews focused on contemporary issues, but also sought to understand recent history. These key informant interviews were conducted in November 2019.

For all key informant interviews, respondents were identified purposively, either on the basis of their positions and engagements with the data collection or analysis processes or via snowball sampling based

on earlier interviews. In person and by Skype or telephone, the team conducted 25 interviews, with a total of 43 people. During each interview, detailed field notes were taken, noting phrases and terminology used by respondents to capture their narrative. Questions were open-ended to avoid leading respondents to particular responses.

Interview notes were coded with an iterative coding approach that was developed both deductively from study instruments and inductively from interview transcripts themselves. Emergent themes were then used to draft the initial outline of this report, with coded information categorized and synthesized accordingly. The Tufts University Social, Behavioral, and Educational Research Institutional Review Board granted clearance for the overall research program on May 31, 2017, renewed on May 25, 2018, and again on May 24, 2019. The study was approved by the Kenya National Commission on Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI) on September 6, 2019.

Key informant sources are noted by reference to an interview number in parentheses. All interviews were conducted on the basis of anonymity of respondents, and no interview respondents or their respective agencies are identified in the report.

This study is not (and was not intended to be) an evaluation of the humanitarian information system in Kenya, the Kenya Food Security Steering Group, the NDMA or the application of IPC protocols to Kenya. It is a specific study based on the four questions outlined in the introduction and motivated by the need for humanitarian response to be based on the most rigorous and most independent analysis possible.

⁶ Reports from the already-completed case studies (Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan) can be found on the Feinstein International Center website at <http://fic.tufts.edu/research-item/the-constraints-and-complexities-of-information-and-analysis/>.

5. Data challenges

Issues arose with both the collection of data and analysis of that data. The two are organized in different sections below. In terms of data, issues were raised about quality and timeliness, missing or limited data, early warning and “hotspot” identification, the focus on specific hazards, and the issue of sharing data in real time.

Data quality and timeliness

One of the issues arising from the interviews was with regard to the timeliness of assessment information to inform action (003, 007, 010, 019). This is more about the SRA and LRA, not early warning. The point was, however, that while early warning may put an issue on the radar screen of responders, often the severity of the crisis or the nature of the required response becomes clear only when the seasonal assessments come out. Cash transfer activities, as a response to drought, activate more efficiently with early warning information. The early warning bulletins are a very important source of data for the SRA/LRA analysis but decision makers give more weight to the seasonal assessment reports than to the early warning bulletins when deciding to initiate early actions—believing the seasonal assessment reports to be more thorough analyses (010, 013). This was particularly a concern of donors. If the information pertains to rapid-onset disasters, such as floods, the information is often delayed because early warning systems are not set up to deal with early action in rapid-onset disasters (015).

Some respondents noted a difference in the reliability of different kinds of information (015): while food-security and nutrition information was generally reliable, other types of information—especially WASH and health information—were less so. The process for checking the reliability of nutrition information, and for generally vetting both methods and results, is particularly strong (005, 012, 013, 017). While food-security information is generally viewed as reliable, one respondent noted that the early warning data, because it relies on the same small

panel of households at the sentinel site level for a whole year, is perceived to be somewhat vulnerable to a “learning effect” in which households learn to “game the system” (018), perhaps challenging the results. Surveillance systems such as the sentinel site system of the bulletins are known to have a variety of weaknesses with implications for the quality, validity, and interpretability of the data (Bilukha et al. 2012).

Missing or limited data

For the most part, data is available for analysis, but two related categories of information are sometimes missing. The first is updated population figures (004, 007, 009, 015, 020) and the other is information on population displacement or movement (015). For assessment or early warning information to be translated into actual caseloads, updated population information is a key requirement, and all the key informants highlighting missing/limited data noted that they sometimes have problems obtaining that information, particularly at the county level. In August 2019, a national census was conducted, and respondents were hopeful this would significantly improve the availability of up-to-date population information. One respondent mentioned that while information on drought is good, information on other hazards—and in particular, localized conflict—is often more difficult to obtain (009). SMART surveys are the source of nutrition and mortality data; areas not surveyed have some nutrition data from the MUAC surveillance system, but they have no alternative source of mortality data. This makes IPC-style analysis more difficult to conduct—particularly in the higher severity phases.

The sharing of data is a constraint in some cases: data may exist, but remains the purview of one agency (or perhaps a small group). The Nutrition Information Technical Working Group has a process by which all SMART assessments are vetted and results are shared, but this process does not exist in the KFSSG or the DISK.

Data from sectors other than food security and nutrition is limited in the analysis. For example, data in the District Health Information System (DHIS2) is not well utilized in the analysis processes and could help fill some of the data gaps identified since it has national coverage.

Early warning and hotspots

Early warning information for food insecurity comes from sentinel sites—some 154 of them spread across the 23 ASAL counties, each monitoring a panel of 30 households on a monthly basis. As noted, this provides adequate information for food-security early warning in classic slow-onset (drought) shocks (O03). But it is not always adequate for health emergencies (such as cholera or other health outcomes) in drought, for water security (O07, O15), or for rapid-onset crises (O20). This means that some “hotspots” are not identified in a timely manner. Kenyan systems tend to be most attuned to drought and its impacts on food insecurity. A more holistic system would need to take into account droughts’ impact on other livelihood factors such as nutrition, drought-related health emergencies, epidemic health emergencies, floods, meso-level conflict, or locust infestations. It already does this for animal diseases. And as noted above, it would need to take into account other hazards.

Despite the surveillance site approach, the role of community involvement in data collection or contextual information is very limited. The surveillance site approach could interface with communities’ ability to gather more perceptual information.

For some responses, approaches to early action avoid EW altogether and simply rely on a “trigger” to activate a response. Several insurance-based approaches have been piloted in Kenya, which essentially tie a single indicator (such as NDVI or other indicator of drought) to a response—effectively replacing traditional early warning with index-based triggers. Index-based livestock insurance (IBLI) is one example that insures livestock losses against drought at the level of individual herders. Similar initiatives have been used for crop insurance at the farm level. These are hazard-specific initiatives (i.e.,

triggered by drought, but not other hazards such as livestock disease, fall armyworm, or desert locusts, to take the three most obvious hazards). Another approach (for agriculture only) is area-yield-based micro insurance, which pays out on the basis of reduced yield, regardless of the cause of the reduction. These operate at the micro level. More macro approaches include initiatives like the Africa Risk Capacity initiative, which Kenya had bought into for several years, but which has been discontinued. Some of this work is being drawn together in the form of a National Disaster Risk Financing mechanism led by the World Bank. The Hunger Safety Net Program is intended to deal with the chronic cases that cannot be insured by private sector mechanisms but has had mixed success with regard to targeting the chronically vulnerable (Kidd et al. 2017). Kenyan organizations have considerable experience with the surge approach to early action, which seems to work well if proper preparations are in place in advance of a crisis (Concern Worldwide 2019).

Hazards

One criticism of information systems in Kenya is that because drought is the largest single hazard, early warning and food-security information systems generally tend to focus on drought and natural hazards, with some indicators of production and markets (Rarieya and Fortun 2010). But, as noted above, information systems are weak on analyzing (and especially predicting) conflict and especially the impact of conflict on food insecurity, health, or nutrition. Only a handful of references on this can be found in the literature on Kenya. Hendrickson et al. (1998) brought attention to this in the case of “cattle raiding” in Turkana District (now County), noting that traditional cattle raiding had become increasingly militarized and commercialized and now represented a substantial threat to the livelihoods—and thus food security—of Turkana pastoralists. Other hazards include floods, animal disease, human disease, and crop pest and diseases such as locusts, many of which are only partially integrated into the existing information systems.

Data sharing

The real-time sharing of data is a concern to nearly all actors who rely on data from other sources (004, 007, 008, 009). Some suggest it is not a problem; others suggest that whoever controls the data controls the narrative on decision-making (and therefore has the strongest influence over resource allocation). On the nutrition side, SMART survey data are usually available on request once results have been vetted

and the agency collecting the information has been able to issue a report. As has been noted in all the other cases in this study, this is not always the case for food-security information. It is mostly an issue of timing—data is eventually shared, but often not while it still has humanitarian value (meaning while it can still influence early action and response). Some shared data has been “rebranded” so as to make it appear as though it belonged to the user, rather than to a primary producer of data (009).

6. Analytical challenges

Several challenges are related more to the analysis of the data rather than simply the collection of the data. These are outlined below.

Analytical process

The KFSSG had long been collecting and analyzing data prior to the introduction of IPC protocols, so views as to how IPC should be incorporated into existing practices differed. One of the issues was whether to first consider causal factors (contributing factors) or instead focus on classification (004, 008, 014). Typically, classification of current status is the first step in IPC analysis. For example the short rains assessment (SRA) conducted in early 2019 after the short rains of October/November 2018 was not IPC compliant because some procedures did not meet IPC requirements. The KFSSG (DISK) practice was to look at the causal factors and possible scenarios, and then rank the county hotspots and outcome indicators, before classifying counties. To several key informants, conducting the classification before considering causal factors was a critical difference between DISK's approach and the IPC approach. It did not necessarily influence the outcomes of the analysis, but earlier in 2018 and 2019, the main actors in the DISK were not in agreement about how to go about

the analysis, leading to something of a breakdown in the process.

Other issues were also highlighted by respondents. The process was not deemed consensus-driven due to a limited number of actors engaged in the technical analysis (004, 015). Questions arose about the reliability of the data: data from the NDMA surveillance system did not meet all of IPC's requirements for reliability; some members of the analysis team were not trained in IPC methodology; and finally, the means of coming up with numbers of people in need and the mapping of IPC outcomes did not always seem to match (004, 006, 008, 025). A meeting of the main actors in the DISK (NDMA, the UN Agencies, and FEWS NET) with the Global Support Unit of IPC in early 2019 helped to resolve these differences. A separate analytical challenge mentioned was around incorporating the impact of humanitarian or safety net cash assistance in the analysis (009)—a common issue mentioned about analytical processes across several countries.

The outcome was a long rains assessment that was fully IPC compliant in July 2019, but the issue also highlighted the differing views on the role of contextual knowledge and qualitative information in systems that are designed to be run not only on quantitative survey data—which is presumed to be globally comparable.

7. Influences on analysis

Observations on data led, in turn, to several issues with the analysis in Kenya, and the extent to which the analysis was independent of any influences on the process.

Participation, leadership, and management

Speaking about the period before the above accommodation was reached, several references were made to the lack of consensus in the analysis and to the analysis being influenced by what in other country cases has been termed the “loudest voice in the room” (012, 016, 017). While the government (the NDMA) clearly led the process, sometimes respondents noted that other key actors held more power over the analysis process. This raised the issue of leadership (008). Again, formal leadership was clear, but procedures did not always reflect this. This is a common problem with IPC analysis—it is by no means limited to Kenya (Buchanan-Smith et al. 2019).

Politics of hunger and food insecurity

Despite good capacity, and the fact that famine risk has not been in the picture in Kenya, instances of political influences on the analysis were raised. These mostly had to do with the final numbers, how they are calculated, and what they reflect at the local and national level. These are variable, depending on the context and the circumstances. Sometimes the political influence involved “lowballing” (in the words of some respondents) the numbers of people in need (006, 025) to make a situation appear less serious than the data might suggest. “Lowballing,” or reducing the numbers of people in need, has been noted in other contexts where actors prefer to avoid discussions of an “emergency” or appeals for external assistance (010, 011, 012), which some respondents

equated with a sense that government is in control and does not need external assistance (016). This makes it difficult for donors to mobilize resources, even if those resources are being requested by NGOs (i.e., not government). While this sounds mostly like a criticism of government, several key informants noted that agencies may also try to influence the overall numbers upwards (013, 019).

On the other hand, at county level fears were expressed about the opposite tendency—to inflate numbers if hopes of attracting more resources to the county (whether from government or international donors) what one respondent termed “resource-based inflation” (013). Several respondents noted that it is very difficult to influence the early warning information collected at household level (or collected by enumerators). It is easier to influence the data once it is in the process of being aggregated and analyzed at county level (014, 016); that is, analysis processes are the issue, not data collection (016).

In terms of the response, government figures for resource allocation are often difficult to acquire, so finding the gaps in the response is difficult (016, 021). These gaps could be met by international donors, but raising money from international sources is difficult unless the government declares the crisis and requests the assistance. As a consequence, international donor support for humanitarian response in Kenya has been low compared to other countries (010, 013).

As a result, there is no single, clear direction in which numbers may be influenced. Typically (not just in Kenya) local government may try to increase numbers (to attract more resources), while national government may try to reduce them. Agencies may also have an interest in trying to increase numbers. Many key informants related specific instances of all these (006, 010, 011, 012, 103, 016, 019), and similar examples were noted in other case studies (Maxwell et al. 2018a, 2018b, 2019, and Hailey et al. 2018).

One episode highlighting these questions occurred in early 2019. Over much of the country, the long rains were late in developing. The rains eventually arrived, but the impact of the delay was felt first and

strongest in the most vulnerable parts of the country, notably Turkana County. As early as March, articles began appearing in the Kenyan press warning of starvation-related deaths in Turkana (Daily Nation 2019a). Other counties were mentioned in the story, but the headlines were about Turkana. Although the current-status indicators in the early warning system at the time did not suggest a serious problem, subsequent independent research in Turkana (Centre for Humanitarian Change 2019) did indicate that the delayed rains triggered a serious crisis for some households—even if there was not a general drought emergency—with chronically vulnerable groups such as women-headed households suffering the worst. Pictures of gravesites of recent victims of hunger appeared on front pages of national newspapers (Daily Nation 2019c). The Deputy President called out the press for reporting the situation in Turkana, saying the reporters would be summoned for questioning, “as they are playing around with a serious matter” (Daily Nation 2019b) and noted that there was no food shortage in Turkana or anywhere else (Daily Nation 2019d). (Of course, no one was reporting an outright food shortage—rather, severe hunger and malnutrition among the most vulnerable groups). Humanitarian agencies were caught in the middle of this stand-off. The press reports did trigger a response—partly funded by national government

and partly by county government, and indeed some by private citizens—but the row between the press (in this case) and Kenya government officials is emblematic of the way in which information—even about isolated instances of mortality—is politically sensitive when it is related to hunger and if words like “starvation” or “famine” are used.

Food relief distributed by the county, while late, did indeed help to reduce a serious food-security crisis among the poorest households in the county (Centre for Humanitarian Change 2019). No doubt chronic poverty played a role in the deaths reported in the press, but so too did the deteriorating food-security situation due to drought insofar as it weakened already highly stressed social support mechanisms. SMART surveys in Turkana in June and July confirmed levels of global acute malnutrition in excess of 30 percent (IPC Partners 2019), but it is difficult to say for certain whether there was a failure of early warning in March, politicization of information, or simply some over-enthusiastic reporters exaggerating the situation. However, the newspaper reports certainly triggered some action on the part of the authorities (underlining the role of a free press in a country like Kenya)—actions that CHC research confirmed was very helpful in dealing with hunger at the time.

8. Conclusions: Lessons learned and recommendations

Lessons learned and recommendations mostly focus on technical issues. Overall, the case study on Kenya is quite different from some of the other cases researched in this overall study. Kenya has a well-developed, government-led information system, operating in a relatively open political system, that works fairly well.

Lessons learned

Lessons learned that have to be acknowledged and dealt with can be broken down in terms of data concerns, analytical processes, and political influences.

Data Concerns. Data concerns are mainly technical:

1. There are concerns about the timeliness of some of the information. This mostly pertains to assessment information—the SRA and LRA. Early warning information is available on a timely basis, but donors tend to place more emphasis on the seasonal assessment reports. This observation applies mainly to food-security and nutrition information with drought as the dominant hazard. Early warning information on other hazards and sectors are not as well developed.
2. Information on food-security and nutrition status are usually available and the systems designed to produce this information are well developed (though nutrition information is not available for all ASAL counties).
3. Mortality is not usually included in nutrition surveys. Information systems for other sectors (WASH, health) are not as well developed.
4. Updated figures for populations, and for population movement, have been a constraint in the

past. The impact of the recent census on this issue remain to be seen.

5. Information on local conflict is often not available—either in terms of systematic monitoring or early warning information. Other hazards, such as flooding, are not nearly as well monitored as drought. The role of community involvement is data collection or contextual analysis is very limited.
6. Data sharing, particularly food-security data, is not always part of the process or not done very well. Nutrition information is shared, if available.

Analytical concerns. Some major analytical procedures have recently been changed to address some recurring issues in recent years.

1. Progress has been made toward building one unified analysis system that fully embraces both the KSSFG's long-existing system and the demands of IPC analysis.
2. However, concern lingers over the limited nature of the consensus-driven process or what had been termed in other case studies “the loudest voice in the room” controlling the analytical process, including the conclusions.
3. There is some over-reliance on SRA/LRA analyses for decision making. Greater trust in the outputs of the early warning bulletins would improve the timeliness of prevention and mitigation interventions. But whether this is an expression of distrust in the analysis of the EW information, or just a decision-making preference, is not clear.

Political influences.

1. There is widespread worry that while the information itself is good and the analysis processes

driven by technical concerns, the actual number of people in need (PIN) is subject to considerable political influence, but with different influences likely at different levels in the system.

2. Likewise, concern is widespread that at the national level, authorities are reluctant to declare a disaster until the evidence is very clear. Early warning may trigger some response, but particularly international actors have a difficult time in early action unless and until there is a clear signal from government, and that signal is often delayed.
3. Even some local organizations have made it clear that avoiding conflict with the government over the declaration of disaster—and therefore the ramping up of response—is a concern (O12). This has led to delayed response in some cases.

Recommendations

1. **Share data in real time.** The information systems operating in Kenya should develop protocols for data sharing in real time to enable better analysis and greater trust in the outcomes. The Nutrition Information Technical Working Group has a process by which all SMART assessments are vetted and results are shared. The KFSSG and NDMA can learn from this.
2. **Make response planning more transparent.** A number of actors noted that while information is available on needs, knowing what all the actors are doing is very difficult. This information flow—which would typically be managed by OCHA—needs to be strengthened in Kenya. In Kenya, the information is managed by agencies and the government. The KFSSG, with NDMA leadership, could address this through much more rapid and complete publication of response data. Integrated Management of Acute Malnutrition (IMAM) programs do this. It would require similar mechanisms from other lead ministries.
3. **Work with government to improve response.** This would include deprioritizing the need for an all-encompassing emergency declaration and having a series of thresholds for the government to use to trigger support without necessitating politically sensitive declarations. Review county contingency and emergency funding mechanisms to improve the ability of the county governments to act locally.
4. **Encourage closer collaboration between government and donors.** Several donors said that “we make our own call” with regard to response in Kenya, rather than waiting on government declarations (O10).
5. **Improve the trust in the early warning bulletins.** Early warning information is crucial for decision making and early action, and for developing a phased approach to government declaration of an emergency. The EW bulletins are updated monthly and are a major source of information in the seasonal assessments, but support from donors and the international community is more focused on the seasonal assessments. Highlighting the link between the EW information and the seasonal analyses would help address this issue.
6. **Include some important elements in information systems that is currently missing.** More detailed information on conflict, health and WASH is needed. Other important elements might also include a sub-system for monitoring rapid-onset crises such as flooding.
7. **Strengthen bottom-up approaches to community based early warning.** Enhance the role of communities in collection of contextual information on food security and early warning.
8. **Make use of all sources of information.** Data from other sectors—such as the DHIS2 (health information system) should be incorporated into the analysis process.

References

- Akong'a, Joshua, and Joram Kareithi. 1998. "Traditional Management of Drought and Famine in Kenya." In *The Arid Frontier*, edited by H. J. Bruins and H. Lithwick. GeoJournal Library Vol. 41: 165–84. Springer, Dordrecht.
- Bilukha, Oleg, Claudine Prudhon, Grainne Moloney, Peter Hailey, and David Doledec. 2012. "Measuring Anthropometric Indicators through Nutrition Surveillance in Humanitarian Settings: Options, Issues, and Ways Forward." *Food and Nutrition Bulletin* 33(2): 169–76.
- Buchanan-Smith, Margie, and Susanna Davies. 1995. *Famine Early Warning and Response: The Missing link*. London: Intermediate Technology Publications.
- Buchanan-Smith, Margie. 2000. "Role of Early Warning Systems in Decision Making." Paper prepared for the Expert Group Meeting on Early Warning Systems for Drought Preparedness and Management. Lisbon, September 5–7.
- Buchanan-Smith, Margie, Suleiman Mohamed, and Julian Carrazon. 2019. "Final Evaluation of the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) Global Strategic Programme (GSP) – 2014–2018." Rome: FAO.
- Carabine, Elizabeth, Marie-Agnes Jouanjean, and Josephine Tsui. 2015. "Kenya Ending Drought Emergencies Policy Review: Scenarios for Building Resilience in ASALs." Working paper. London: Overseas Development Institute.
- Centre for Humanitarian Change. 2019. "Improving Food Security Analysis. Turkana Assessment: Differentiating IPC Phase." Nairobi: CHC.
- Concern Worldwide. 2019. "Global CMAM Surge Approach." Operational guide. Dublin: Concern Worldwide.
- Daily Nation. 2019a. "On the Brink of Death." *Daily Nation*, March 18, 2019.
- Daily Nation. 2019b. "No Drought Deaths in Kenya, No Food Crisis, Ruto Insists." *Daily Nation*, March 20, 2019.
- Daily Nation. 2019c. "Hunger: The Reality from the North." *Daily Nation*, March 22, 2019.
- Daily Nation. 2019d. "Government Gives Sh2bn for Drought but Says No Cause for Alarm." *Daily Nation*, March 18, 2019.
- Grunewald, Francois, Valerie Leon, and Simon Levine. 2019. "Comprehensive Review of the 2016–17 ECHO Horn of Africa Drought Response." London: Groupe URD/ODI.
- Hailey, Peter, Jeeyon Janet Kim, Erin McCloskey, Maria Wrabel, and Daniel Maxwell. 2018. "The Constraints and Complexities of Information and Analysis in Humanitarian Emergencies: Evidence from Somalia." Medford MA: Feinstein International Center, and Nairobi: Centre for Humanitarian Change.
- Hendrickson, Dylan, Jeremy Armon, and Robin Mearns. 1998. "The Changing Nature of Conflict and Famine Vulnerability: The Case of Livestock Raiding in Turkana District, Kenya." *Disasters* 22(3): 185–99.
- IPC Partners. 2019. "Technical Manual Version 3.0: Evidence and Standards for Better Food Security and Nutrition Decisions." Rome: The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification Global Partners.
- Jackson, Kennell. 1974. "The Family Entity and Famine among 19th Century Akamba of Kenya: Social Responses to Environmental Stress." *Journal of Family History* 1: 193–216.
- Kidd, Stephen, Bjorn Gelders and Diloá Bailey-Athias. 2017. "Exclusion by Design: An Assessment of the Effectiveness of the Proxy Means Test Poverty Targeting Mechanism." Geneva: International Labour Office.

- Kim, Janet, Erin McCloskey, Peter Hailey, and Daniel Maxwell. 2018. "Constraints and Complexities of Information and Analysis: Data Planning in Famine-Risk Countries. Findings and Recommendations for Food Security Analysis: South Sudan, Somalia, Nigeria and Yemen." Feinstein International Center Report. Washington DC: MQSUN.
- Maxwell, Daniel, Peter Hailey, Jeeyon Janet Kim, Erin McCloskey, and Maria Wrabel. 2018a. "The Constraints and Complexities of Information and Analysis in Humanitarian Emergencies: Evidence from South Sudan." Medford MA: Feinstein International Center, and Nairobi: Centre for Humanitarian Change.
- Maxwell, Daniel, Peter Hailey, Jeeyon Janet Kim, Erin McCloskey, and Maria Wrabel. 2018b. "The Constraints and Complexities of Information and Analysis in Humanitarian Emergencies: Evidence from Nigeria." Medford MA: Feinstein International Center, and Nairobi: Centre for Humanitarian Change.
- Maxwell, Daniel, Peter Hailey, Lindsay Spainhour Baker, and Jeeyon Janet Kim. 2019. "The Constraints and Complexities of Information and Analysis in Humanitarian Emergencies: Evidence from Yemen." Medford MA: Feinstein International Center, and Nairobi: Centre for Humanitarian Change.
- Mbithi, Phillip, and Ben Wisner. 1972. "Drought and Famine in Kenya: Magnitude and Attempted Solutions." Working Paper 46. Nairobi: Institute for Development Studies, University of Nairobi.
- Obrecht, Alice. 2019. "Adapting According to Plan: Early Action and Adaptive Drought Response in Kenya." London: ALNAP.
- Oxfam/Save the Children. 2012. "A Dangerous Delay: The Cost of Late Response to Early Warnings in the 2011 Drought in the Horn of Africa." Oxford/London: Oxfam and Save the Children.
- Rarieya, Marie, and Kim Fortun. 2010. "Food Security and Seasonal Climate Information: Kenyan Challenges." *Sustainability Science* 5(1): 99-114.
- Slim, Hugo. 2012. "IASC Real-Time Evaluation of the Humanitarian Response to the Horn of Africa Drought Crisis in Somalia, Ethiopia and Kenya." New York: Inter Agency Standing Committee for Humanitarian Response.

The Feinstein International Center is a research and teaching center based at the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University. Our mission is to promote the use of evidence and learning in operational and policy responses to protect and strengthen the lives, livelihoods, and dignity of people affected by or at risk of humanitarian crises.

Twitter: @FeinsteinIntCen

fic.tufts.edu

