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FAMINE, FAMINE RELIEF AND PUBLIC POLICY IN KITUI DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

It is generally known that famine is both a biological and social phenomenon that can be man or naturally caused. As such, it has both physiological and interpersonal implications. In Kitui district of Kenya, famine is usually a consequence of drought, though in the past, weevil birds, locusts, floods and rinderpest have contributed to the severity of famine there. Famine in Kitui district is therefore predominantly environmentally related. There are limitations on how much can be planted and harvested since it lies in a semi-arid region where drought is a recurrent problem causing acute shortages of food, water for human and livestock consumption and pasture. Long range subsistence planning is therefore nearly impossible due to the scarcity and variability of rainfall.

In the first part of the paper, there is a description of memorable, therefore culturally significant famines, possible dates of occurrence since 1897 to 1981, and their local names. What transpired during the specific famines in terms of response and adjustment is considered from two points of view. 1. What the people of Kitui did to adjust to the specific famines such as pawning wives and daughters for food, migration etc. 2. What the (colonial or postcolonial) administration in the area did to assist the people survive the famines through famine relief provisions, tax exemption etc.

The second part of the paper consists of the results of a district-wide survey aimed at eliciting the people's perception of their environment, famine and famine relief. Thus, the descriptive (historical) and statistical data presented provide us with an assessment of past social and monetary costs of famine, especially in the provision of famine relief food. From the past Kitui experiences, two recommendations are made: 1. There should be a consistent famine relief policy which should be part of the already formulated food policy. This would have district variations and would consist of provisions such as famine monitoring machinery; machinery for identifying local famine stricken families; transport facilities for famine relief; control of smuggling, price rises and hoarding. 2. Regional specialization of production, agriculturists living in symbiotic relationship with pastoralists so that drought need not give rise to famine if food can easily be transported from other regions.

Owing to the fact that the author of this paper was not able to proof-read the stencils, some typing errors which would significantly alter the meaning of portions of the paper have to be corrected.

1. Page 1 paragraph 1 2nd word Eastern Kenya. Paragraph 2 line 8, 4th word experienced.
2. Page 4 2nd last paragraph line 1 nzaa ya masera'eng'e.
3. Page 6 paragraph 1 line 3 from bottom, last word sell instead of wall
4. Page 7 last paragraph line 2, end of the line should read it can be concluded that the lack of use of the money.
5. Page 9 paragraph 2, line 6 9th word strategy of alleviating. Paragraph 3, line 2 1st sentence should start with "First". Last paragraph line 5 last sentence reads "The famine was therefore"
6. Page 10 second last line on the page should start with "accumulate"
7. Page 11 paragraph 1 line 2 2nd last word two instead of who.
8. Page 12 line 1 should end "unpalatable"
9. Page 13 line 8 from top "..... parents contributed one bull or 5 goats a week! Paragraph 2, line 5 from bottom 5th word measure wage remittances from labour migrants, were the main sources of cash.
10. Page 15 paragraph 2 line 10 4th word catastrophe.
11. Page 17 paragraph 1 line 4 end of line - deleterious effects.
12. Page 20 line 3 starts with should.
13. Page 24 paragraph 1, line 10 after comma, should read "... but noting"
14. Page 25 middle paragraph 2nd last sentence should read "In all, 11,980 ten kilogram packets of katumani seeds were supplied to 1,188 female groups all over the district".
15. Page 29 line 5 from bottom of page, put quotation marks before ibid.
16. Page 36 continues to page 38 while page 37 is actually 38
17. The first reference attributed to Mbithi should be deleted.

FAMINE, FAMINE RELIEF AND PUBLIC POLICY IN KITUI DISTRICT (1)

Our success in controlling nature gives us confidence that we shall eventually be able to control the social world in the same measure (Znaniecki, 1974:1).

Introduction.

The subject of famine is not a very popular one in Anthropological and Sociological literature, partly because famine has regular occurrence in arid and semi-arid areas of the world where effective research instruments are still to be developed. However, with the increasing need to plan for and upraise the standards of the people living in such areas, especially since the most recent Sahelian drought and famine, global and national attention has been re-focused to include arid and semi-arid areas. One such area of interest is Kitui District of Eastern Province of Kenya.

From the earliest recorded and oral history of the Kamba people residing in Kitui district, it is evident that they have experienced cycles of droughts and consequent famines arising from water and food shortages. In this area, famine does not therefore refer to acute shortages of food alone, but also of water for human and livestock consumption (Akong'a, 1981). The recurrence of such problems has transformed famine into an unavoidable, naturally caused vice and an institutionalized cultural phenomenon since some people's names and ages, major historical events etc, take reference from the chronology of unforgettable past famines. In fact, these are some of the culturally patterned ways in which the memories of specific famines are kept alive in people's minds.

According to Dirks (1980), famine has both biological and social dimensions with physiological and interpersonal implications. From the social point of view, there are three phases that characterize adjustment to famine conditions. When people first learn of the onset of famine, they seek and give assistance through the culturally patterned reciprocity networks. The persistence of famine with the corresponding depletion of food resources leads to the erosion of these networks. The family rather than the community becomes the unit of survival and beyond a certain limit, individualism and selfishness sets in when the survival of the individual becomes the goal. This is probably the time when famine-related deaths have started occurring. This approach to the study of famine is useful in recording the effects of famine on the population and the individual. However, without applying the -

1. This paper is part of "Drought, population dynamics and public policy: a socio-economic study of Kitui. I am indebted to Rockefeller Foundation that provided the funds for the research and preparation of this paper.

some to specific famines, it would be difficult to know whether human responses to all famines follow the same pattern.

In Eastern Kitui, discussion of famine has centred on assessing its magnitude; social and monetary costs; and what needs to be done to ^{increase production and productivity} in order to prevent future famines (Mbithi and Wiener, 1972; 1974). One shortcoming of such an approach is the tendency to overemphasize the possibilities of increasing production and productivity without realizing that the physical environment has many limitations.

In this paper, I wish to merge the two approaches focussing on response and costs respectively, because there is need to get an impression of how people respond to famine situations in their attempts to acquire food and water. This has implications on the social and monetary costs of famine, especially in form of famine relief food. These two factors have implications on what needs to be done to eliminate famine and its effects. O'leary's descriptive method of studying famine (1979:84-97) is adopted as an effective way of reviewing the culturally significant famines experienced by the Kitui Kamba in recent times since 1892 to 1981. The aim in this part of the paper is to isolate the perceived causes of specific famines, what the people did to adjust to the famines and the measures undertaken by the Government to assist the people to survive. This is in recognition of the fact that although literature on how people adjust to drought and famine conditions is available, "little has been written on food relief" (Porter, 1979:79).

The description of specific droughts and famines will be followed by a discussion of the results of a district-wide survey designed to identify people's perception of their environment, famine and famine relief. The descriptive and statistical data provide respective historical and statistical bases for deducing government policy associated with famine and famine relief; and deriving what needs to be done in terms of future government famine relief policy in the district and probably the country as a whole.

Methods of data collection.

The data used in writing this paper was collected in Kitui in several ways:-

1. Scanning through files in the Kitui district archives in Embu and Kitui towns.

2. A standard questionnaire was administered to 345 heads of households of whom 257(74.5%) were male and 88(25.5%) were female. The majority of the questions on the standard questionnaire were open-ended in nature designed to elicit the respondents' own categories. Although there are 5 administrative divisions in Kitui, namely Southern, Central, Eastern, Mwingi and Kyuso, the questionnaire was administered in 6 regions. Central division was subdivided into Central and Western Kitui. The aim was to accommodate any possible cultural and environmental differences. The distribution of the respondents by division was as follows:-

Table 1 Distribution of respondents by division.

	<u>Absolute Frequency</u>	<u>Relative Frequency</u>
Southern	67	19.4
Central	73	21.2
Eastern	76	22.0
Western	66	19.1
Mwingi (Northern)	40	11.6
Kyuso (Far North)	23	6.7
	<u>345</u>	<u>100</u>

3. The last method of data collection was holding thematic discussions with the oldest surviving members of the community, male or female. This was achieved by the principal investigator staying with a family, usually that of the interpreter/guide and through familiarity in the community, held casual, unstructured discussions with people knowledgeable in the history of the Kitui Kamba. Such key informants provided detailed information on whatever they could remember about memorable famines, their names, possible dates of occurrence and what transpired during the specific famines as will be described in the next section of this paper.

Adjustment to specific famines: a historical exegesis.

Although oral traditions suggest the occurrence of severe famines in 1826, 1868, 1870, 1878, 1880, 1883 and 1888, for lack of adequate evidence, our discussion begins with the famine which started in 1897 when the famine referred to locally as Lwaya-aligator, struck central Kitui. During this famine, people hunted aligator for food because the wild game had disappeared from the forests and caves because of a severe drought.

In the following year, the famine spread to all parts of Kitui driving people to resort to diverse and desperate methods of adjustment. As a result, the famine came to be referred to severally depending on how the people in local areas perceived it. In Kitui central for example, it came to be known as nzaa gene or nzaa kubwa-big famine. Alternatively, it was referred to as ngomanisie-spread all over or worldwide. Since 1898 was the same year that a colonial post was opened in Kitui town, the famine was unique in the history of the Kitui Kamba in several ways:-

1. The first colonial administrators in Kitui were able to experience it and as a result, accurate records of it were kept.
2. The colonial administration immediately initiated moves to provide foodstuffs in selected market areas to be purchased and as free famine relief. The name of the famine became nzaa ya magunia-the famine of sacks (of food). Rice was made available in Mwonji in northern Kitui where the Kamba from Northern and Central divisions exchanged bulls for rice. Those in Southern Kitui, especially Kanziko location, trekked to Kibwezi in Machakos to receive free famine relief from a food depot that had originally served railway builders. The depot was now under the personal charge of the local African District Commissioner (A.D.C.) as a famine relief centre for the region. Some of the famine relief recipients trekked back to their homes in Kitui with loads of food for their relatives there. The food was then used little by little by several families as they trekked to Kibwezi to settle there temporarily. The journey from Southern Kitui to Kibwezi used to take two weeks. In Southern Kitui therefore, the famine came to be known as nzaa ya mvunga- the famine of rice (which saved them).

Some people would prefer to call it nzaa ya maseng'ing'e- the famine of "cheap" wives. The reference derives from a mode of coping with famine by which husbands or fathers pawned their wives and mature or underage daughters respectively, to men within and outside Kitui who could provide the rest of the family with food credits. The pawns were expected to be ransomed by payment of cattle. Some of the pawns were of course turned into wives, others escaped when the ransom did not seem forthcoming after the famine, while others were actually ransomed into freedom.

Pawning women as a mechanism of coping with a severe famine is historically not a phenomenon unique to the Kitui Kamba. John Middleton in his study of the Lugbara of Western Uganda observed that "Formerly there were --

periodic famines at the end of the dry season, recurring every ten years or so, which can be dated by the marriages of "cheap" wives who fled from famine areas and were married in return for shelter" (1965:6). There is no evidence from Kitui, that any of the female pawns were ever turned into slaves either within Kitui or in Kikuyuland where most of them were taken and where there are many Kamba satellite villages and clans.

Amber presents a vivid impression of how people in Kitui responded to this famine :-

Animals became a main source of food; goats were held in store to be exchanged for grain. Men turned avidly to hunting; large groups from both sides of the Tana even met at the river to organize the killing of hippos. All kinds of wild fruits and berries became dietary staples, and small children spent their days foraging for these and the roots called *ngatu* that were prepared and eaten. But such actions were only stop-gap measures; they could not possibly support people through famines lasting several years. Indeed, the traditions recall that people were soon reduced to eating the skins that they slept on, their quivers and even the urine soaked slings used to carry babies (1977:7).

Because of the hopelessness of the situation, the Kitui A.D.C. Mr. C.R.W. Bane accompanied a caravan of about 5,000 Kitui Kambas in search of food across river Tana in Kikuyuland. This traditional mode of coping with scarcity was as successful as usual. However, the strugglers were attacked by people identified as Kikuyu, robbing them of the food they had so painfully acquired and carried. Angered by this, Mr. Bane petitioned for a punitive military expedition against the Kikuyu. Later, the Kamba were never harassed. What is not clear is whether the Kamba had usually experienced problems in carrying food back home from Kikuyuland or if it had been due to the severity of this particular famine that had turned some people into thugs, waiting to rob what others had acquired through credit, barter or as gifts.

In the following year in 1899, smallpox broke out, decimating large numbers of people not only in Kitui but also in neighbouring districts (Sarronson, 1962:17). In the same year, the rinderpest which had been sweeping through the Maasai and Kikuyu areas finally converged in Kitui killing large numbers of livestock. Thus, by a combination of drought; shortage of food, water, and pasture; and diseases; many animal and human lives were lost between 1897 and 1899. The surviving old men who were young at the time remember this famine as unsurpassed by any other in the known history of scarcity in Kitui.

In 1901, there followed a period of scarcity known in most parts of Kitui as nzaa ya malakwi - the famine of beans (cf. O'Leary 1979:10). The name derives from the ummedhi which saved them: beans, which they had never seen and eaten before. People sold their livestock and with the money-ruppes, they bought beans. The famine is also referred to as Kilovoo - rupee for it was the time money had just been introduced in Kitui. Those who had no cattle to sell were provided with free beans. Following the famine, there was another outbreak of smallpox which killed many people of the already emaciated population.

In 1908, rain failed for two consecutive seasons. The famine which resulted was not so severe. However, it caused some concern to the local native council which decided to import maize from Western Kenya, at the time referred to by Europeans as Kavizongo - those who sit on their heels. Instead of making the maize available to shopkeepers or distributing it free as famine relief, headmen were forced to purchase it in bulk using their own money. They were expected to sell it to famine stricken families in order to recover their money (2).

Drought has not been the only major cause of famines in Kitui. In 1915, locust swarms and weevil birds were the first to destroy the November crops before drought set in. The food shortage that resulted was acute only in the area of Southern Kitui.

Three years later in 1918, the famine which was experienced resulted from the failure of the 1917 November rains and the 1918 April rains. The famine was not so widespread because some parts of the district had had some harvests. The situation did not therefore warrant emergency measures to import food into the district. First, "The highland locations around Kitui (town) were never short of food and were able to sell large quantities of grain and beans to people in north and east of the district" (3). Secondly, the food depot at Kibwezi remained open since July 1918 till the end of the famine in December. The famine was nicknamed mukungu kwongo - that which beats the head. This is because during the famine, many people were struck by severe headaches, probably meningitis, which caused death. The famine was also referred to as vita kuu - the big (first world war). In fact, the head disease is said to have started among the men who had just returned from the war.

2. Kitui District annual report, 1902-8
3. Kitui District annual report, 1917-18

In 1928 there followed a severe drought that was brought about by a combination of locust swarms and drought. In January of that year, the A.D.C. Mr. Devonport acknowledged extensive destruction of vegetation by locust swarms. According to an informant of over 80, 1928 was the beginning of the existence of manjalata patches of ground completely denuded of vegetation which the colonial administration attributed to overstocking. According to him, the vegetation took a long time to rejuvenate, causing the drying up of springs and streams on hill-sides.

When the locusts landed in Kitui central, my informant was married to the first of his three wives. They had laid their first born child, a daughter, under a tree as they banded their crops when suddenly the apparently misty skies gave vent to the hungry locusts. As they rushed to pick up the baby to run for the shelter of their house, they found that the baby had already been attacked by the locusts. She died shortly afterwards.

Left with only tree trunks without vegetation the population became panic stricken. The local administrative officials estimated that 20,000 people from northern Kitui especially Tharaka and Mumoni crossed river Tanaito ^{the} thebouring Kikuyu districts. An additional 5,000 left southern Kitui for the coast settlements such as Mariakani and Mombasa. Some of the people left with livestock and returned with food. Of those who stayed back home 300 sick and aged people were provided with famine relief gifts amounting to Sh. 767. This was far short of the Sh. 22,000 which had been set aside for use to purchase famine relief food that year.

Noting the magnitude of social dislocation the famine caused through migrations and massive sale of livestock, it can be concluded that the lack of the money earmarked for famine relief does not imply there were no more famine stricken cases than the 300 that warranted emergency relief food.

1. It may have been due to ineffectiveness to human suffering on the part of the local administration. Past experience however, contradicts this position.
2. It may have been lack of knowledge of the people needing such assistance due to the absence of the machinery for identifying the deserving cases. This is a serious problem even today.
3. It may also have been due to the hopelessness that gripped the colonial officers on the spot, which led them into delaying action.

In an attempt to rectify the situation, tax collection was postponed to allow the people to face the most immediate problem: how to survive the famine. The administration recognized that the absence of transport infrastructure development was a major handicap in moving food into Kitui. As a consequence, chiefs were hastily sent to recruit able bodied men for road construction efforts. At least, 300 men agreed to work on road construction for food at the rate of 21 pounds of maize flour, occasional meat, salt and Sh. 5 a month. Work for food was unpopular kind of famine relief for which only a handful of the starving people presented themselves at their own volition. The A.D.C. for example observed:-

They prefer to live by their own devices which I fear were the pursuit of old law suits, sponging on their clansmen in Kikuyu and elsewhere, picking wild berries, digging up certain edible roots and most frequently of all the hunting of wild game, especially elephant(4).

That year, at least Sh. 30,000 was spent on road construction with good fruits. The road bridge across Athi river, a cement causeway across river Tiva and Ikutha in southern Kitui on the Kibwezi-Kitui road, and the Thika-Kitui road were completed. This greatly boosted the transportation of food into Kitui district. From northern Kitui into the neighbouring Kikuyu districts such as Meru and Embu, the Kitui Kamba still used the traditional means of crossing river Tana. Usually, the food seekers crossed the river by holding on to a tight rope tied on trees on either bank. During the flood season when the water would be shoulder high as one walked across the river bed, those who were afraid called upon the services of expert swimmers who were too willing to ferry them across with their loads at a small fee. Such services are still provided even today.

The severity of the locust menace led to the formulation and publication of by-laws designed to oblige people to eradicate the problem by any means. On June, 5 1929 for example, the locust rules were published under the diseases of plants and prevention ordinance, making locust reports and destruction compulsory. On November 14, 1929, the Hon. Chief native commissioner, inserted under section 8 of the native authority ordinance "locust destruction in all stages" as work which headmen in local areas could issue orders. What most people did was to kill the locusts physically to cook or roast them for food.

4. Kitui District annual report 1928.

Following the continued destruction of crops and vegetation by locusts, the A.D.C. advised people to start planting cassava. Being a tuber, cassava would survive locust destruction. It would also be resistant to drought.

The famine which was experienced in 1932 cost the local administration Sh. 100,000 spent on buying pigeon peas and maize for relief food supplies. Tax rates in 4 southern locations were also reduced to leave people with more money with which to buy food. After the famine, the A.D.C. Mr. R.J.C. Howes requested for a permanent agricultural officer to be posted to Kitui to improve methods of crop production as a long term strategy alleviating the famine problem. He noted that "Even partial failure of rains results in a periodic threat of famine and until this threat is removed once and for all, progress in other directions is necessarily delayed"(5).

In 1934, some famine was experienced in some parts of Kitui as a result of two causes. First, the long rains of that year came late resulting into poor harvests. Secondly, the A.D.C. of Kitui at the time thought that heavy taxation in form of livestock as a form of disguised destocking process was to blame for the famine. It deprived many families of the alternative means of survival. He observed;

This famine was a very severe one as it was the culmination of a series of poor seasons and reserves were exhausted, as also, I am sorry to say, partly owing to tax-was the stock-wealth of the majority(6).

By the end of the year, 2,000 people had been employed to work for famine relief food on public projects. The famine did not disappear completely that year. When it resurfaced in 1935, people realized that by collecting livestock bones, they could sell them to Asian traders at various market centres. The Asians would in turn sell them maize flour. The famine therefore referred to as nzaa va mavindi- famine of bones. According to O'leary, £50,000 worth of food was made available in Asian shops to be purchased with the money received from the sale of livestock and livestock bones. In that year, 20,698 head of cattle and 63,718 head of small stock were exported on the hoof through officially arranged auctions (O'leary, 1979:89). In addition to these measures, famine relief was provided at schools, dispensaries and other public centres.

5. Kitui District annual report 1932

6. Kitui District annual report 1931-45

noted that unlike the Kikuyu the Kamba found the potatoes unpalatable. Moreover, the maize and maize flour provided was quite unusual. It was red in colour. The famine therefore came to be called Katune.

Throughout the period of scarcity, most of the people working on public projects in the district opted for maize and maize flour in lieu of their wages. In the final analysis, it was found that famine relief to destitutes alone, had cost the local native council sh. 144,137.95 in 1945 and sh. 286,065.00 in 1946. An extra sh. 10,000 had been spent on feeding children attending school (O'leary, 1979:91).

Between 1949 and 1951, there was another major drought and famine generally referred to as makonge. During the famine, people in the district especially in central, western and northern parts made sisal-makonge which they sold to buy food. In some areas, red maize flour was distributed as famine relief. The severity of the famine led the A.D.C. Mr. Kelley to say, "the district was more desiccated than any other period for the last fifty years" (9). This was probably an exaggeration on the part of the A.D.C. who was still new in the district and had probably not known the severity of the previous, more recent famines.

It is in 1949 however, that there occurred a radical change in the local administration's practice of intervening to assist people to cope with famine situations. That is, although maize was being imported from other districts at the rate of 2,000 bags a month for sale, Mr. Kelley was of the view that "as long as there are large numbers of surplus stock in the district, famine cannot be considered to exist" (10). It is this kind of "official" view which condoned drought and famine as blessings in disguise.

9. Kitui District annual report 1951.

10. Kitui District annual report 1952.

Mr. Kelley therefore eschewed famine relief supply for he considered it "pauperization of the population". Such a policy of indifference to human suffering did not last for long. After the failure of rain for a fourth consecutive season⁽¹¹⁾,

1) Food was stockpiled at dispensaries for free distribution;
2) Free meals were provided to primary school children at their schools. The children were also given free maize flour if parents contributed one or 5 goats a week! to supplement the school diet. These measures were undertaken to prevent the collapse of the normal functioning of primary schools.

3) In fact, whole families were permitted to work for food on dams and roads, the weaker getting light work. The aim was to use famine relief food supplies as a means of promoting long term development and to avoid the routinization of dependency attitude.

d) The very poor and the old, incapable of work were admitted at dispensaries as inpatients till they regained strength through the provision of small doses of food.

The next food shortage started to appear in different areas of Kitui in 1952 due to persistent droughts. In 1955, the April rains failed in the whole district, leading to widespread shortages of food, water and pasture. Large scale food imports followed and although no famine relief food was provided free, the imported food was transported to areas of severe food shortage to be purchased. During the year, 30,000 head of cattle were exported on the hoof through official channels (12). Other exports such as 117,049 goat and sheep skins; 102,858 head of poultry; beeswax; castor seed; hides; and meagre wages remittances from labour migrants, were the main source of cash used by the people and the local native council to buy food (O'leary, 1979:94). On their own, the people obtained food from their traditional sources in Machakos and Kikuyuland.

The 1960-61 famine was a very unique one, not only in the history of Kitui but also Kenya as a whole. It was caused by the

11. Kitui District annual report 1949-50.

12. Kitui District annual report 1955.

combined effect of insect pests, drought and floods. First during 1960, insect pests known locally as nguti invaded Kitui district. They looked like grasshoppers, but they were definitely not locusts. They destroyed most of the green vegetation including crops. There followed prolonged drought in various parts of the district and country. The drought was so widespread and prolonged that the colonial administration in Nairobi became alarmed. This led to rain making experiments in the Rift Valley Province, especially at Njoro and Rongai where European Maize and Wheat farmers had been hard hit. (13)

On July 27, 1960, it was reported that Baringo was one of the districts that would require emergency relief supplies. The report said;

Over the past 18 months, organized stocksales have left the average Tugen and Njemps with little if any surplus stock with which to cushion themselves against famine conditions and the Suk have lost more cattle in the rinderpest scourge (14)

The same was probably happening in other districts such as Kitui. For example on Friday, August 20, 1960, it was reported that 1,500,000 bags of maize would be needed in Baringo district, southern and coast provinces in form of famine relief. When it started raining in northern, central and eastern Kenya in October 1960, it immediately started flooding (15). The short rains of 1960 and the long rains of 1961 became one long season of continuous raining all over the country. In Kitui, the provision of famine relief became necessary during the second half of the month of November 1960. The famine relief came from two major sources: yellow maize which was imported from the United States and the forces' famine relief consisting of powder milk for children in the district.

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13. East African Standard, July 7, 1960.
 14. East African Standard, July 27, 1960.
 15. East African Standard, November 18, 1960.

Since road transport was impossible due to the floods, helicopters were used to drop sacks of maize, maize flour and other relief items into villages. This is why it is remembered as the famine of ndege-aeroplane.⁽¹⁶⁾ In fact, 40% of all the maize provided as famine relief in the whole country in 1960-61 came from outside the country (Mbithi and Wisner, 1972:5). It began a new era in the administration's policy concerning famine relief.

All previous famine relief provisions in Kitui had been undertaken by the native local council, but now the central administration was involved. Secondly, it was probably the first time massive importation of food for famine relief from outside the country had been undertaken. Third, since it was a national calamity, it was probably the first time the Central Government machinery in Nairobi was focused on famine relief as an emergency operation needing quick decisions, coordination of operations and commitment to assisting the common person in the village. It was a national catastrophe which ought to have triggered-off immediate discussions on food and famine relief policies for the whole nation had it not been for the fact that this was a time when African political activities following the state of emergency had heightened and had been recognized by the colonial officials. This had probably left the white colonial officials unwilling to take radical policy initiatives. This was despite the fact that "Kenya (had) spent sh. 12½ million on internally purchased maize and transportation alone" (Mbithi and Wisner, 1972:5).

The famine supplies were stopped in Kitui in 1962,⁽¹⁷⁾ only to discover that widespread provision of famine relief throughout 1961 had resulted into an aggravation of the overstocking problem. The people had found it unnecessary to slaughter their livestock for food and to sell some of the livestock to buy food as they had traditionally done during past famine.

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16. Handing over report Mr. J.R.M. Tennent to J.F. Johnston, April 4, 1961.
 17. Handing over report, Mr. A.D. Galton Fenze to Mr. J. Shako, 1962.

The conclusion to be drawn here is that the colonial officers' attitude towards pastoralism was negative. To them nothing good could be expected from the ownership of a large number of livestock. This, it has to be pointed out, was a misunderstanding both of the local people's accumulated experience and of the weather conditions in the district which did not and to this day do not permit an individual family to rely entirely on agriculture. The people knew that in times of severe drought and consequent famine, a family with a large herd had better chances of surviving than the family with a small herd.

During a severe drought large numbers of livestock die of lack of pasture, water and because of disease. A family with a small herd will definitely find it wiped out within no time, while a large herd is likely to be reduced in size but not wiped out. The remainder of the herd is then used as food or exchanged for food. It is therefore a pity that in some parts of Kitui, especially Kitui central, pastoralism is no longer a viable occupation.

In 1968, there was famine which was very similar to the one experienced in 1960-61 in terms of its cause. It did not come as a result of drought but too much rain. That is, in most parts of Kitui, especially central and southern Kitui, the short rains of November 1967 continued till April 1968 when the long rains are usually expected. To appreciate how continuous raining though without floods can cause food shortages, one needs to be familiar with the structure of houses and storage facilities in Kitui. Following the short rains of 1967, there was going to be a bumper harvest if the crop would have been harvested, but it was not. Most houses in Kitui are too small to be used for storage of grains as it is in Western Kenya. The crop has to dry in the fields before it is harvested and stored in granaries outside houses. Thus, as a result of continuous raining, the crop rotted in the fields. The result was a famine during which 400 people received permanent famine relief food supplies. An additional 60,000 received occasional famine relief food. (18)

18. Provincial Agricultural headquarters, Eastern Province
January 20, 1972.

Since 1968, the next severe famine on which enough information is available was experienced from 1970 to 1972. It was brought about by drought. Though it was a regional drought, the whole nation had been sensitized to the deleterious effects of the 1960-61 famine. As a consequence, when the occurrence of the famine was first reported in newspapers, famine relief aid came not only from the central government but also voluntary organizations, a phenomenon that was unprecedented in the history of famine relief provision in the district. For example, between March 24, 1971 and April 17, 1971, 420 bags of maize was received from the government. Between April and July of the same year, 1,835 bags of rice and 1 drum of edible oil was also received at the district offices for general distribution to famine victims. In June, Machakos Teacher Training College donated 130 packets of maize flour, while two months earlier in April, the Red Cross had donated the following items:- 90 packets of powder milk; 220 packets of dried vegetables; 97 bags of maize flour; 200 cartons of baby food; 124 tins of meat and 55,000 multi-vitamin tablets.

All the famine relief commodities were channeled through the District Officer's office to avoid duplication in the distribution process. The famine relief food was then sent to divisional and eventually locational centres for distribution. Urgent attention was focused on children who were provided with food at soup kitchens. By the end of the year, 37,000 children were being provided with hot food at hot soup kitchens around the district. According to Mbithi and Wisner, the government spent sh. 20 million between January 1970 and January 1971 on national famine relief food, Kitui district included (1972:5).

Following the famine, the Provincial Commissioner for Eastern Province made recommendations for the possible long term plans to combat famine and avoid massive relief food supplies in future:-

- 1) Minor irrigation schemes covering 1,500 acres to be started in eastern Mwingi and Kyuso where famine relief supplies had been more widespread. The problem with such a recommendation is that the availability of water for human and animal consumption is in such acute shortage throughout the year that the use of any available water for irrigation is like misappropriation of available water resources.

2) Katumani (hybrid, early maturing) maize seeds to be encouraged and emphasized over the local variety.

c) Provide free seeds to ensure that people have seeds to plant. Lack of seeds at planting time is a serious problem experienced in almost all parts of the district every year. First, it is due to the fact that most of the commodities are consumed in whole before the onset of the planting season. Secondly, due to poverty and the scarcity of income generating activities, people find themselves with no money to buy seeds during the planting season.

In addition to the Provincial Commissioner's suggestions, the action committee of the Freedom From Hunger sent a dispatch to the P.C. requesting him to support the following suggestions:-

1) The use of fertilizers, pesticides and improved seeds. Such a recommendation in the circumstances of persistent droughts may not have been very useful since the problem being experienced was not poor crop yields but destruction of crops by drought.

2) The use of simple agricultural implements such as jembes, pangas etc. This recommendation was probably based on the assumption that poor harvests in the district can partly be attributed to poor technology.

3) The initiation of water development projects such as dams, pumps, pipes etc.

4) The inauguration of nutrition education programmes and small scale animal husbandry projects such as poultry keeping, rabbit rearing etc. These would not only provide mixed diet for most families but surpluses would also be sold to generate some income.

5) The initiation of the concept of Kitchen gardens for the purpose of growing vegetables and fruits. This was a grand suggestion because from personal experience in the district, little green vegetables and fruits are consumed. The problem however is how to conserve water when it does occasionally rain. Vegetable gardens are possible on a permanent basis in very few river valleys, otherwise most of the rivers are seasonal and dry for most of the year.

6) Large scale animal husbandry projects to be started. The government through the Ministry of Livestock Development is currently actively engaged in encouraging commercial, co-operative ranching schemes in the district.

Following their recommendations, the Freedom from Hunger sent Katumani composite B maize seeds to be planted during the April long rain season of 1972.⁽²⁰⁾ The seeds were sent to all the districts of Eastern Province in the following measures:- Isiolo, 250 packets; Machakos, 250; Kitui, 200; Marsabit, 150. The 850 packets of maize seeds cost the Freedom From Hunger organization sh. 15,300. In addition to the seeds, the following items were also sent:- Sh.24,040 worth of fertilizers to be given only to Isiolo and Marsabit; 20 bags of rose cocoa beans costing sh. 2,000; Insecticide worth Sh. 3,300; 100; pangas worth Sh. 520 and 100 small folk jembes worth Sh. 1,350. How the recipients of these items were selected or whether they were distributed free as expected, are questions beyond the scope of this paper.

On September 28, 1972 however, it is the Office of the President which alerted the Eastern Provincial Commissioner of the existence of famine in Kitui and Machakos districts. Three factors may account for such state of affairs. First, it is a manifestation of the absence of drought and famine monitoring machinery in the districts and the country as a whole. Secondly, since local officials at districts and provincial levels are usually people from other districts, usually the so-called high potential areas, it is easy for them to take a famine situation for granted for it is difficult for them to differentiate between a season of plenty and scarcity. Thirdly, it may be a manifestation of the fact that there has been decentralization of administrative machinery without the corresponding autonomy of decision making powers and the necessary staff competence.

Though we have observed that during the colonial era, it is the local district native council which was usually responsible for famine relief supplies, it was probably due to the competence of the district officers in making appropriate decisions and plans that kept the central administration in Nairobi

20. Kitui District archives at Embu, Agr. 11/21/Vol. vii/138.

from intervening. The finance may partly have been provided by the central administration but the decisions on what and how it should be spent usually came from Kitui district capital. Decisions made at lower levels such as this are likely to be more specific to the problem. The situation however, changed in 1960 and has continued to this day when apparently, the government officers at district level do not seem to have the power and probably, the capacity to make decisions independent of the central government in Nairobi. According to Chitere "decentralization of decision making necessitates Professional competence.....(and)....entails giving field staff not just authority to make decisions, but opportunities to actually exercise discretion in discharge of their duties" (1980:36).

As a response to the alert signals from Nairobi concerning the 1972 famine, the District Commissioner of Kitui informed the P.C. for Eastern Province on October 23, 1972 that some cattle had already died due to water and pasture scarcity. This was proof that the drought and famine had been in existence for a considerable length of time. In a dispatch of November 23, 1972 to the Permanent Secretary in the Office of the President, the D.C. for Kitui asked for three things:-

1. Famine relief food.
2. Katumani maize seeds for those who could not afford to buy it. The seeds were to be planted that month.
3. To induce people to plant cassava as an insurance against persistent drought and famine. This was an unfortunate request because it is the D.C. but not the Permanent Secretary who is with the people and should encourage them to plant certain crops. It is difficult to get an impression of the magnitude of the famine due to lack of information on how much famine relief was received.

Due to the failure of the April rains of 1975, famine broke out, necessitating famine relief food supplies. From May to September, a total of 3,300 bags of maize is recorded to have been received as famine relief food in Kitui. (21) Hot soup kitchens were also set up at Kisasi in Kitui central where the famine was viewed as more acute. Here, 1,200 mothers and children were served with porridge consisting of maize flour, milk and sugar on July 29, 1975 alone. (22)

Persistent drought and poor harvests continued into 1976, necessitating a request by the D.C. to the Permanent Secretary in the Office of the President to consider assisting people with seeds to plant in November of that year.

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21. Kitui District archives at Kitui 11/21/vii/1975.
 22. Kitui District archives at Kitui 11/21/vii/201 .

The famine relief budget for seeds sent to the Office of the President included the following items:-

Table 2: Projected famine relief seeds, July 1976

6,000 packets of Katumani maize	Sh. 162,000
2,000 bags of beans	440,000
6,000 bags of millet	360,000
3,000 bags of sorgum	150,000
5,000 bags of cowpeas	750,000
2,000 bags of pigeon peas	440,000
2,000 bags of castor seeds	100,000
Cassava for bulking	50,000
Transportation of cassava sticks	<u>80,000</u>
Total projected cost.....	<u>2,532,000</u>

The above budget was revised and integrated into the provincial famine relief seeds estimates as shown below ²³ ..

Table 3: Eastern Province: famine relief estimates October 1976

District	Katumani Maize (bags)	Sorgum serewn	Millet bullrush (bags)	pigeon peas (bags)	Cassave (lorryfulls)
Machakos	1,000	500	500	140	7
Kitui	1,000	500	500	140	6
Mbere	60	60	50	60	2
Tharaka	60	60	50	50	3
Isiolo	35	50	50	5	1
Marsabit	<u>60</u>	<u>50</u>	<u>30</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>1</u>
Total	2,215	1,220	1,180	400	20
Total cost Sh.	201,700	12,200	115,500	120,00	22,000=471,400

There is no record showing whether or not the Office of the President responded to the request for seeds by sending any seeds or money for the seeds.

The figures available for the 1976 famine in Kitui however, are sufficient food for thought. They have a bearing on the future food situation in the district and probably the nation in general. For example, by November 30, 1976 the following relief food had been received in Kitui.

23. Eastern Province, October 1976: Famine relief seeds estimates. Kitui District archives.

Table 4: Relief food supplies in 1976

Month	bags of maize	bags of beans	grams of butter	powder milk kgs.
January	3,900	500	---	1,250
February	3,500	500	---	----
March	8,000	1,000	21,750	2,600
April	8,000	600	----	----
May	8,000	200	----	----
June	8,000	500	----	----
July	8,000	--	----	----
August	8,000	1,000	----	----
September	8,000	1,000	----	----
October	8,000	---	---	----
Total	71,400	5,300	21,750	3,850

Among others, the voluntary organizations which responded to the situation in Kitui were the following:-

1. National Christian Council of Kenya which gave 21 bags of powder milk; 1,000 mattocks, 1,000 shovels and 200 oxploughs. These items were sent through the office of the D.C. Earlier on February 14, 1976, they had channeled 33 ploughs and 66 chains through the office of the President ²⁴.
2. The Presbeterian Church of East Africa donated 263 bags of maize; 10 bags of cabbages; 3 bags of beans; 2 bags of millet 33 cartons of maize flour and 75 baskets of dates.
3. The Catholic Relief in Distress gave food for general distribution valued at Sh. 64,580; Sh. 70,980 to the school feeding program and seeds worth sh. 15,540.
4. The Anglican Diocese of Mount Kenya Donated 20 bags of maize.
5. Moyale District in North Eastern Province gave 30 bags of maize ²⁵

Over the same period, the government sold 8,594 bags of maize and beans to Kitui prison, hospitals and the school

24. Kitui District archives at Kitui, 11/21/viii/331
 25. Kitui District archives at Kitui, 11/21/viii/349

feeding program. By December 1976, the government had increased relief maize supplies from 8,000 to 10,000 bags a month, and beans from 1,000 to 1,500 bags a month. The food was being distributed at 20 sites selected by the district development officer. At least, 290,000 people were getting famine relief food on a permanent basis.

As the situation continued to worsen all over the district towards the close of the year, the D.C. instructed all the locational officials to make a thorough investigation and draw up locational registers of starving people needing food relief. The registers revealed that 378,735 people that is, 180,673 children and 198,062 adults needed food relief. The figure would have been bigger if the registers from Ikutha and Voo would not have been found missing in the Kitui District Archives at Kitui. In fact there must have been exaggerations in these figures, but not in that the population of Kitui during the 1969 census was 342,953 ²⁶ and 463,512 in 1980 ²⁷. It can easily be concluded that nearly every resident of Kitui district needed famine relief food. The cost of providing such food was enormous. For example, it is known that by December 28, 1976, the chief accountant in the Office of the President had paid out Sh.2,177,500.25 towards famine relief food for Kitui district alone. The question which such famine relief figures suggest is, if at least three districts in Kenya had famine of the magnitude Kitui experienced in 1976, would the nation find itself with the food and transport facilities capable of coping with the problem without depending on outside donors? Such a question is extremely disturbing in view of the panic which gripped the nation during the 1980-81 national famine to be discussed later.

Evidence shows that the December/January harvests were not adequate to wipe out famine from the district. The manager of the maize Produce Board was therefore instructed on January 18, 1977 to release 4,000 bags of maize to the D.C. of Kitui. On March 10, 1977, a further 3,000 bags were ordered

26. 1969 Kenya populations census. Government printer

27. Ministry of finance and planning, central bureau of statistics. Kitui office.

into the district. On March 31, a similar amount was also received, indicating that famine was still widespread. On April 15, however, 300 bags of maize were released, not for distribution but for purchase at subsidized prices. On April 2, 1977 the government suggested the following seed requirements for the people of Eastern Province for planting that very month:-

Table 5: Seed requirements in April, 1977 ²⁸

The Crop	Kitui	Marsabit	Isiolo	Meru	Embu	Total
Millet	600	10	-	50	50	710
Sorgum	400	20	-	100	600	1120
Cowpeas	400	5	10	20	30	465
Katamani	5000	600	600	1500	600	8300
Green grams	400	20	8	60	50	538
Beans	300	10	8	50	100	468

It is probably due to the difficulties experienced in trying to identify the famine stricken people deserving free seeds that the local administration identified Mwethya female self-help reciprocal groups as the best medium for seed distribution. Most married women belong to one or the other of these groups. Thus, by October 18, 1977, 1,198 Mwenthya groups had been identified. They were advised to prepare their gardens in readiness for planting in November. In all, 11 188 female groups all over the district. The distribution on the divisional level was as follows:-

Table 6: Seed distribution to Mwethya groups in Nov. 1977

Division	Number of groups	Number of packets of Maize Seeds
Central division	644	6,440
Southern	69	690
Eastern	72	720
Mwingi	355	3,350
Kyuso	68	680
Total.....	1,188	11,880

These seeds were provided on condition that after the harvest the same amount would be returned to the district store to be re-supplied. What was overlooked here was that Katamani

28. All the figures are in bags of 90 kg each except for Katamani maize which is given in packets of 10 kg each.

being a composite seed, would not be re-supplied without first, selling it and buying fresh seeds. The expected short rains actually came and there was a good harvest which did much to alleviate the deleterious effects of famine.

Three years later in 1980 and 1981, Kitui was caught up in another famine which affected directly or indirectly nearly every Kenyan. The famine was caused by the combined effect of drought, hoarding and smuggling across international boundaries. First, the November 1979 rains failed in some parts of Kitui. This was followed by the failure of the April 1980 rains all over the district. By this time people in the northern locations were already starving. In July, what was recognized as a national calamity was already having serious consequences in Kitui, which together with Turkana are the two districts that received some free famine relief food. The food consisted of yellow maize, wheat and rice from the United States and other friendly nations.

According to a report in "The Standard" of March, 7 1981. The League of the Red Cross spent Sh.215 million between October 1980 and March 1981 in providing famine relief food in Turkana and Pokot districts where there were 8,000 people permanently receiving daily food rations. For most of 1980 and 1981, the European Economic Community has spent enormous amounts of money on providing famine relief in Turkana with the result that till now, December, 1981, many people in the district are still permanently herded together in famine relief camps..

In Kitui, there were no massive famine relief food supplies comparable to the situation experienced during the 1976-77 famine period. This implies that most of the food imported from outside the country was rationed to traders for sale. According to one district official, the district was receiving 1,000 bags of yellow maize a month as famine relief ²⁹ It was allocated by the government through the Kenya Farmer's Association store at Kibwezi. More Maize, packets of Maize flour, wheat flour and rice were coming in for sale through whole-sale traders appointed as government agents. The traders bought

29. Personal communication.

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their rations directly from Nairobi and sometimes Kitui town, When the commodities became available in Kitui, they were sometimes sold at exorbitant prices on the black market not only because this would fetch the traders more money but also because they needed to recover the high transport costs they had incurred. The second alternative was to sell the commodities close to market centres to minimize transport costs.

Investigations carried out in December 1980 revealed that unscrupulous traders licensed by the D.C. to make basic food items available could take them to eastern Kitui at night, where they could exchange one bag of maize costing sh.100 at government controlled price for 4 adult goats, each costing a minimum of Sh.200. Packets of maize and wheat flour were going at twice the controlled price in some areas far away from market centres.

Realizing that there were serious problems in getting food commodities where they were needed, and that when these were made available, they were at prices villagers could not afford, the district officials instituted very stringent measures of control. An agent could be given the license to go and buy foodstuffs only if he had signatures from the local councillor, KANU chairman and the chief. When he made the commodity available in the local area, the same officials had to ensure that he had the exact amount he had been allocated at the store. They then supervised the selling of the commodity. Similar controls were applied to the distribution of free famine relief food. Through such measures at least 75% of the foodstuffs provided through the government machinery for sale and as famine relief reached their destination. Because of the extreme pain people experienced in looking for food to buy, the famine was nicknamed nikwangwete - I die when I possess (money).

The Catholic Secretariat through their local offices at the Kitui Parish Centre participated actively in the provision of famine relief for the 1980-81 famine. This was partly because 1. They receive and provide such aid on behalf of donors from outside the country.

2. For convenience, they have established permanent infrastructural facilities at the level of the Dioceses (district) for co-ordinating local church groups for the provision of aid to rural programs such as water projects, hospitals and clinics, educational programs such as women groups and marriage counselling, and of course in the provision of famine relief food. Their aim is to raise or maintain the standard of living of the people of the district, catholic or non-catholic.

During the 1980-81 famine period, they had two famine relief programs in operation.

1. Food for work

Those who were famine stricken as identified by the local catholic church leadership provided some physical labour on community programmes such as terracing, road construction, building churches and schools etc in order to be given famine relief food. Thus between February and June 1981, 10,764 bags of rice each containing 100 pounds and 2,946 cartons of cooking oil, each containing 6 gallons, were released for distribution under this program. The food was provided by the churches in the United States as emergency famine relief food. Otherwise, food for destitutes is usually received from the catholic church institutions outside the country twice every year.

2. Food for mothers and children

Over the same period as noted above, 3,687 bags of rice and 3,563 (25 kilo) bags of powder milk were released for distribution under the food for mothers and children program. This program was instituted in recognition of the fact that Kitui district is generally poverty stricken and when famine strikes, mothers and children suffer most.

In general therefore, it can be concluded that the past history of the food and water situation in Kitui does not paint a bright future for the district. For example, the "Daily Nation" of August 26, 1981 quoted the Provincial Director of Agriculture for Eastern Province as saying that with the exception of Meru, food production in the Province has been on the decline. Of course, the problem is that when drought and famine strike, they neutralize any progress previously achieved.

Theoretical and Policy Perspectives

The statistical and descriptive evidence given, strongly contradict Wisner's hypothesis that famine in eastern Kenya, Kitui included, is man-made; a product of regional growth and income disparities. It also contradicts his view that "Vulnerability of drought has increased in close association with the development of the settler economy in Colonial Kenya, and Subsequently the Africanization and expansion of the economic relations established under Colonialism" (1977:194). First Kitui district was a purely native district where settler agriculture was eschewed, probably due to its dryness and because Kamba pastoral practices would have impeded settler agricultural development.

Secondly, drought and famine being natural, unpredictable phenomena, how can they be associated with settler economy and africanization? As Feckholm observes, "droughts are an unavoidable aspect of the arid environment. Though they cannot be predicted with any precision, they should never come as a shock" (1975:142). Thirdly, considering the evidence already presented, what the colonial and Post-Colonial administrations have done to assist the people of the area is enormous.. Thus, if Wisner's hypothesis were true, then the solutions to the problem would have been simple, but are they?

Kitui being a semi-arid district, the famine problem is environmentally related. "People try to plan against the hunger season, but they are usually unable to prevent its occurrence" (Ogba, 1973:33). In this, the Kitui Kamba are similar to other societies residing in similar environmental conditions because "local Conditions often do not permit long-range subsistence planning in these societies. These conditions include the ecological limitation on the amount of food that each family can grow (and harvest) at any given time (ibid). As a result of these environmental limitations the material standards of life of the majority of the people is low. This implies that people are usually able to invest in capital assets if there is adequate or surplus food.

Cultural perception of adjustment to famine

In a district wide survey carried out between September and October 1980, during the most recent famine in Kitui, 345 heads of families were asked whether they thought there would be crop failures in the future. The responses were as follows:

Table 7: Possibilities of future crop failures (and famines)

	<u>Absolute frequency</u>	<u>relative frequency</u>
Yes	241	69.9
No	21	6.1
Don't know	<u>83</u>	<u>24.1</u>
Total	345	100

The majority of the people in the sample i.e. 69.9% indicated that crop failure and as a consequence, famine are recurrent problems in the district. A quarter of the respondents (24.1%) however, could not commit themselves one way or the other. This is because it would be tantamount to predicting weather conditions, the factor which is predominantly responsible for crop failure in the district.

Asked to say why they thought there would be more crop failures in the future, 258 responses were recorded in the following proportions:

Table 8: REASONS FOR FUTURE CROP FAILURES

1.	There have always been crop failures and famines once every 2 years.	<u>A.F.</u> 81	<u>R.F.</u> 31.4
2.	Rainfall is unreliable and unpredictable	82	31.8
3.	Poor farming facilities	20	7.8
4.	Destruction of crops by birds and Monkeys	6	2.3
5.	Too much rain destroys crops	2	0.8
6.	Climate has changed and crop failures occur often.	3	1.2
7.	It is God's Will	7	2.7
8.	There has been overgrazing	<u>52</u>	<u>22.1</u>
	Total number of responses	<u>258</u>	<u>100</u>

From the above figures, 31.4% of the responses idealize crop failures and as a result, famine as a phenomenon which recurs with a regular pattern. They believe that every after two years, there must be a severe drought. Alternatively, there is a belief that two consecutive seasons of bumper harvests are usually followed by a season of crop failure.

The first two patterns of response in Table 8 account for 63.2% of all the recorded responses for the question. This implies that the people perceive the circumstances which are responsible for crop failure as natural and as such, beyond human control. When the respondents were asked what they would do if they were warned of a future crop failure, the pattern of responses was recorded as below. The question was asked with the historical knowledge that in Kitui, crop failures have always been followed by famine.

Table 9: What people would do if warned of crop failure.

	<u>A.F.</u>	<u>R.F.</u>
1 Stay and see-persevere	45	11.6
2.Migrate to a better area	6	1.5
3.Stop wasting time tending the farm	5	1.3
4.Save money to buy food	254	65.5
5.Improve farming	15	3.9
6.Sell livestock to buy food	46	11.9
7.Look for a job	17	4.4
Total number of responses	388	100

The above responses confirm our earlier observation that crop failure in Kitui is perceived as a natural occurrence which man cannot prevent. This does not however mean that people do not do anything aimed at making them survive the famine. Even the 11.6% of the responses which indicate that people would stay and see, do not mean that the people would sit around waiting for their fate. Following a crop failure, people's efforts are focused primarily on searching for food and water. In response to the above question for example, 65.5% of the people would likely start saving money to buy food. The major source of money in Kitui is the sale of livestock. A person who owns livestock is not only likely to survive a severe drought but is also able to pay school fees for his or her children. He or She is also able to afford the other necessities of life required by the family. For example, out of the 345 heads of families reached during the survey, 259(75.1%) own livestock; 75(21.7%) do not, and 11(3.2%) did not respond to the question. Of those who own livestock, 176(68%) sold some between January 1980 and September when the survey was starting. The livestock were sold for the following reasons:

Table 10: Why people sold livestock

	<u>A.E.</u>	<u>R.B.</u>
1. To buy smaller livestock for bride-wealth	12	4.3
2. To stock a business	3	1
3. To buy essentials	153	54.3
4. To pay school fees	79	28
5. To pay for medical care	13	4.6
6. Others, eg. pay debts	22	7.8
Total number of responses	282	100

The responses suggest strongly that agriculture should not be viewed as an alternative to pastoralism as the colonial administration in the area used to think. The two should be advanced and developed as complementary occupations- agriculture as a source of food and livestock as a source of cash.

One would have expected that in an area where crop failures and famines are recurrent, any harvest should all be stored. This would be true only if there were adequate alternative ways of getting money for other things. When asked what the family did with the last harvest, the following responses were recorded.

Table 11: What the family did with the last harvest

	<u>A.F.</u>	<u>R.F.</u>
1. Stored all	191	55.4
2. Sold some	67	19.4
3. Gave away some	8	2.3
4. Gave away some and sold some	72	20.9
Total number of respondents	345	100

The above table shows that although the majority (55.4%) of the people stored all the harvest, all would have done so if it had not been for two major reasons:

- 1) Selling some of the harvest for money to buy other things;
- 2) Abiding by the principles of reciprocity by giving some of the harvest to relatives and friends. However, following a crop failure, most people (71.4%) get food by buying it.

Other sources of food are as mentioned in the table below:-

Table 12: Sources of food after a bad harvest

	<u>A.F.</u>	<u>R.F.</u>
1. Buy food	320	71.4
2. Work for food	25	5.6
3. Get famine relief	18	4.0
4. Sell livestock to buy food	32	7.1
5. Get help from relatives	34	7.6
6. Other	19	4.2
Total number of responses	448	100

The evidence already presented indicates that adjustment to crop failure and famine are specific to given environmental resources and as such, are culturally specific. In the discussion of specific famines, it was also observed that the strategies employed in adjusting to crop failure and famine change with specific droughts and famines as the available resources change and as new ideas of increasing food supplies evolve.

As a result of persistent droughts and famines in the district, people are generally poor, with low material standards. Asked to indicate how crop failures have affected the people of

Kitui, respondents gave the following responses:-

Table 13: How crop failures (famines) have affected the people of Kitui

	<u>A.E.</u>	<u>R.F.</u>
1. Not much	5	0.9
2. Poverty increased	139	25.1
3. Social disorder	70	12.6
4. Temporary migration	60	10.8
5. Permanent migration	114	20.6
6. Children drop out of school	33	6
7. Loss of livestock	57	10.3
8. Depopulation by death	76	13.7
Total responses	554	100

It can be concluded from the above table and the earlier description that lack of adequate food and water supply have had far-reaching effects on the population. Some of these effects can be viewed in their own right as adjustments to conditions of scarcity. The majority of the responses (25.1%) for example, indicate the existence of general poverty. People go in tattered clothes; take one or two meals a day, a factor made worse by high food prices during famine. We can imagine this resulting into poor health and little motivation for work.

Permanent migration aimed at moving out of the location to another or out of Kitui district altogether, and temporary migration to look for food or pasture both account for 31.4% of the responses. Among those who do not migrate, petty crimes; inter-and intra-family conflicts; broken homes, early marriages especially for underage girls; rural and urban prostitution increase. Children from poorer families, especially those with no livestock to sell drop out of school, not only due to lack of school fees and uniform but also for lack of food. Human and livestock lives lost as a result of drought and famine related effects cannot easily be measured. As noted in the description of the specific famines, the government usually comes to the people's aid in times of severe famine. The people's perception of government aid can be evaluated by the analysis of the question requiring respondents to say what the government does when there is crop failure.

Table 14: What the government does when there is a crop failure

	<u>A.F.</u>	<u>R.F.</u>
1. Controls prices	81	14.3
2. Transports food to nearby places	104	18.4
3. Provides food relief	289	51.2
4. Any other	5	0.9
Total number of responses	565	100

The pervasiveness of previous famine relief supplies is recognized by 51.2% of the responses. 18.4% of the responses recognize the government assistance in making basic foodstuffs available in shops, while 14.3% indicate that the government controls prices. In fact, the very mention of the latter two factors while responding to an open-ended question is suggestive of the problems encountered in obtaining food in shops.

When the respondents were asked to name any other desirable assistance needed in the area, the responses recorded touch on the indirect and infrastructural government assistance which can alleviate some of the deleterious effects of food and water scarcity. A summary of these is in the table below:-

Table 15: Other desirable (government) assistance needed in Kitui

	<u>A.F.</u>	<u>R.F.</u>
1. Build food stores	9	1.1
2. Provide free farm inputs	81	10.2
3. Provide free (tap and irrigation) water	239	30.2
4. Provide free boarding schools	117	14.8
5. Provide farm credit facilities	44	5.6
6. Improve transport facilities	100	12.6
7. Build hospitals and clinics	127	16.0
8. Any other	75	9.5
Total number of responses	792	100

People's perception of what is needed indicates a general lack of

1. Water facilities such as dams, rock catchment barriers, weirs and tanks.

2. Medical facilities such as hospitals, health centres and clinics.
3. Security for school children, a factor which demands the introduction of boarding primary and secondary schools to minimize school dropouts and to cushion the students against starvation.
4. Transport facilities such as roads and bridges. Across most of the dry river valleys, there are cement causeways which make those valleys impassable during the rain season.
5. Farm inputs such as implements, seeds and technical advice especially on extensive dry farming practices.

The provision of credit facilities and building food stores are not viewed as very significant, probably because of the high risk of crop failure. Recovery of loans or capital invested would be difficult.

Conclusion and Suggestions

From the experiences of the Kitui Kamba therefore, the most logical conclusion to be drawn is that there is need for a national famine relief policy. Such a policy would have provisions for local district variations. In Sessional Paper No. 4 of 1981 on National Food Policy, article 1.6 emphasizes increased food production and distribution of basic foodstuffs. There is need to recognize that when forecast food production targets cannot be met as it happened recently in 1980, contingency measures of sources of food, the type of food, where it is acutely needed, how it is to be transported and distributed, need to be identified and planned for in advance.

The suggestion is that a national famine relief policy should in fact take into account the following factors derived from the Kitui experiences:-

1. Relative regional or district specialization in production. Predominantly pastoral districts such as Kitui, Turkana, Samburu, Kajiado etc. should not be encouraged to practise marginal agriculture as an alternative to pastoralism. This is likely to increase desertification and expose the populations living there to more environmental hazards. Marginal agriculture should be increased in the future when breakthrough in arid area appropriate

greed, thus holding the population at ransom on a life and death issue.

5. This is why detailed transportation provisions in the suggested famine relief and the already formulated food policies should be spelled out. Thus, famine need not be a logical consequence of drought as is usually the case in Kitui, if adequate supplies of food can be effectively moved into drought stricken areas.

6. It is therefore suggested that in each district, famine monitoring committees consisting of local church leaders, K.A.N.U. officials, councillors and peasant farmers who hold no official positions in government should be formed. The committees should be as independent as possible from the normal government functionaries in each district. When a local famine emerges, the local district famine monitoring committee should alert the D.C. who probably through the P.C. should get into contact with the Office of the President and the Ministry of Agriculture for famine relief food and other appropriate assistance.

This process has the potential of preventing a situation similar to what happened in 1972 when it was the Permanent Secretary in the Office of the President in Nairobi that alerted the P.C. for Eastern Province of the existence of famine in Kitui district. Since the committees would have prior knowledge of what is needed, how much, where it is needed and who should get it, aid from the government, voluntary organizations, companies and individuals would be channeled through them. Through their supervision and monitoring machinery smuggling, hoarding and overcharging of foodstuffs would easily be detected, prosecuted and as a result, controlled. Similarly, through proper accounts, decisions would be made about what to do with the surplus famine relief supplies.

According to Dirks "nearly every year a food emergency occurs somewhere on our planet, and, despite regular recurrence, there is an unfortunate tendency to deal with each one on an adhoc basis, particularly in coping with human needs that arise" (1980+ 21) This is the situation that has existed in Kitui for a long time which now demands a consistent policy to govern adjustment to drought and famine. In the formulation of such a policy, "Policy makers should recognize cultural mechanisms of coping with famine

technology will have been achieved. For the moment, pastoralism and marginal farming should be practised as complementary occupations.

2. Predominantly pastoral districts lose a lot of livestock during severe droughts. If some of the livestock were bought through government or co-operative agencies to be fattened and sold in predominantly agricultural areas such as Western and Central Provinces, the pastoral regions would receive grains in exchange through similar channels. Such measures would ensure the availability of markets for both grains and livestock. Such a program would probably lower prices of some of the food items such as meat since the program would cover all corners of the country, parts of which have not yet been reached by markets external to the local area.

3. Regional specialization in production and sale of food commodities would call for a national survey aimed at making an inventory of the food resources available in each district, what the staple food is and therefore, what the people in the district would need as a survival foodstuff during famine. Currently, there is an assumption that everyone in Kenya would be comfortable with maize flour. This may not be true especially of the pastoral communities.

4. The historical Kitui experiences strongly suggest that the whole population cannot depend entirely on government famine relief supplies during a severe drought. The government is limited in providing adequate, regular amounts of food supplies. Relief therefore suited for the critically famine stricken families. The other families are better off if they are left free to resort to reciprocal kinship, friendship and credit facilities that are culturally conditioned and regulated in acquiring food for survival. Many Kitui Kamba families for example, have survived past famines by acquiring food through channels outside the district in Meru, Embu, Machakos and the coast. If such links are served by the government through the closure of district boundaries, thus prohibiting the movement of foodstuffs as it happened during the 1980-81 national famine, then many of the people who would have easily survived the famine by resorting to these channels are exposed to undue hardships.

The closure of boundaries in 1980-81 was probably aimed at curbing smuggling and was done with the assumption that the government had assumed the responsibility of transporting basic foodstuffs. The Kitui experiences however, strongly demonstrated that the government's good intentions can easily be deviated to serve individual

situations" (Morris, 1974: 1855), so that the people remain relatively in control of the survival strategies. As Morris suggests, "considerable effort should be focused on development and expansion of self-insurance schemes that require a minimum of bureaucratic discrimination" (1974:1855). This would minimize dependency on government supplied food resources.

Thus, instead of contending that famine relief provision is "one of the few occasions when the poorest segments of society are able to get something from the rich". (Morris, 1975:288) stop-gap measures such as this one should be integrated into long term strategies of attacking the causes of food shortages so that the problem can be eliminated. Thus, the suggested food and famine relief policies should not dwell on the problem alone as it has usually been in Kitui, but should also focus on long term food resources and on the minimization of the impact of drought and famine. This is why it is suggested that the famine relief policy be part of the national food policy.

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