

This paper analyses how local populations and the government have responded to drought and famine in Kitui District, Eastern Province, Kenya. First, a history of drought and famine in the area, dating back to the 19th century, is presented. Then the major impacts of drought and famine are sketched and national and local coping strategies are examined. Finally, some alternative solutions to the problems are suggested. It is shown that, until recently, government and local interventions have been limited to relief efforts, rather than development activities. The result is that people in the district are generally poverty-stricken. Only in the past decade have several government/donor-funded programmes in forestry, agriculture and water development been initiated in Kitui. It is argued that the eradication of famine calls for both direct and indirect methods. Recommendations to formulate a national famine-relief policy are presented. To improve living conditions in the long term, it is suggested that the national food policy should encourage regional specialization in production and interregional exchanges.

KEYWORDS: RURAL | Economic policy | social policy | planning | emergency relief | drought | food shortage | government policy | local level | food policy | long term | Kenya | Eastern Province