

RURAL HOUSEHOLD FOOD SECURITY
A Focus on Small-Scale Farmers in Kisii District,
Western Kenya

By

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ABSTRACT

This study is based on a practical observation. In spite of a good climatic potential, farmers in Kisii District, Kenya seem unable to meet their year-round subsistence. This situation, attributable to various agrarian processes and transformations portrays a picture of farm "households" that may be operating on spiral production while others are experiencing diminishing returns, situations beyond which they need to realise a leap. What could lead to this necessary leap in the face of no alternative employment and limited cash crop farming necessitates the need to establish and explain rural "household" food security. This will be looked at in light of livelihood strategies and patterns of farm management, resultant processes of the interplay between policy and farm dynamics.

Kenyan government policies have endeavoured to adopt technical strategies that can enhance production, namely: through the use of hybrid seeds, widespread application of fertilisers and insecticides, intensified on-station research and dissemination of results. In spite of this, the country had recorded major food shortages; notably in 1961, 1965, 1967, 1980, 1980, 1994 and potentially 1996. Thus, the government assumption that adopted policies will lead to increased food production, which will in turn necessarily translate into food security at the "household" level has

become elusive. The question is: what may have gone wrong and why is the farmer seemingly no longer able to subsist? In case others are trying, which is it so difficult for many of them to escape from food insecurity? We will therefore focus on how and why some farm "households" succeed where others fail.

It is our contention that household level food security is a result of a myriad relationships and interactions enshrined in the farmer's interpretation and subsequent management of available resources. Thus, the study's main task is a conceptualization of the food security process in terms of a management of resources from the farmers point of view. In order to answer the research question, we aim to identify and interpret models of existing and potential food security strategies.

Fieldwork will run for total of seventeen months. In order to observe and adequately interpret the food security process over time (and space), both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies will be applied.