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Policy Brief: Ecological Organic Agriculture
Benefits in the Agriculture Sector

September 2017

Executive Summary

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)[1] have placed significant emphasis on the need to **"ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages";** of which food and nutrition security forms a big part.

It is in light of the above that the relevance and importance of Ecological Organic Agriculture (EOA) in both food production and food value chain processing, delivery and marketing systems and consumption is articulated, in a sustainable approach, as opposed to current conventional agricultural approaches, which are not sustainable when considered in the context of sustainable development goals.

Health and food and nutrition security are inadvertently linked. Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) are the leading causes of death in all regions except Africa; however, current projections indicate that by 2020 the largest increases in NCD deaths will actually occur in Africa. **By 2030, in Africa, deaths from NCDs are projected to exceed the combined deaths of communicable and nutritional diseases and maternal and perinatal deaths**[2]. Kenya, like most developing countries is also facing the double burden of communicable and non-communicable diseases, especially those linked to diet-related NCDs. This policy brief will delve into the looming gaps that are currently curtailing the adoption of EOA in Kenya. More specifically, the policy brief will outline critical gaps in national and international policy documents used by the Ministry of Health (MOH) to identify the existing policy gaps in the literature. The Policy Brief will then recommend possible solutions to address these existing challenges and gaps.

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[1] The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include: No poverty; Zero hunger; Good health and wellbeing; Quality education; Gender equality; Clean water and sanitation; Affordable and clean energy; Decent work and economic growth; Industry, innovation and infrastructure; Reduced inequalities; Sustainable cities and communities; Responsible consumption and production; Climate action; Life below water; Life on land and Peace, justice and strong institutions.

[2] For more information please see the WHO NCD factsheet, 2013 available at http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs355/en/

Introduction

Kenyan communities have a long history of consuming foods that were high in fibre and rich in macro and micronutrients. More recently, however, there has been an incremental increase the consumption of highly processed fast foods[3], which in turn has resulted in a rise in diet related NCDs such as diabetes, heart diseases, kidney and liver failures (some cancers are increasingly being attributed to dietary changes as well). Contributing factors are diverse and include imports and local production of more processed foods, increased adoption of unhealthy lifestyle changes, eating habits, urbanization and globalization. In the absence of strong and effective promotion and education of the benefits of a healthy diet and lifestyle policy and strategy, these and other factors have contributed to a shift from traditional foods which were low in fat and rich in fiber, towards a diet with commercially processed food products, many of which contain high levels of saturated fats and simple carbohydrates and sugars. Consistent consumption of such foods coupled with a sedentary lifestyles, are prime contributory risk factors for obesity, cardiovascular diseases, and a myriad of other non-communicable degenerative diseases, in adulthood. Kenya's "nutrition transition" has been gaining momentum and is aptly illustrated by the worrying trends. Significantly and of note is the concomitant increase in the use of agro-chemicals, like glyphosate, which has been linked to some cancers.

Methodology and Approaches

This Policy Brief utilized a double pronged approach which included review of relevant policy documents and validated by interviews with key informant interviews and input from Stakeholders during a stakeholder validation workshop. Relevant policy documents included: Kenya Health Policy: 2014 – 2030[4], Kenya Health Sector Strategic and Investment Plan (KHSSIP), July 2013-June 2017[5], National Food and Nutrition Security Policy, 2011 and the National Nutrition Action Plan (2012- 2017), Kenya National Strategy for the Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases (2015 – 2020)[6].

Findings and Results

Kenya has twelve (12) regulatory ministries/government departments and twenty (20) Acts of Parliament that govern, oversee and regulate food safety in the country; the key agencies in charge of this sector includes the Department of Public Health, Government Chemist, KeBS, Department of Veterinary Services, 24 National Food and Nutrition Security Policies and the Kenya Plant Health Inspectorate Service (KEPHIS) among others. The biggest challenge facing these national bodies is the lack of effective coordination and collaboration between these agencies and policies.

Kenya has a significant number of legal instruments that govern and regulate food safety in the country, including: the Public Health Act Cap 242 of the Laws of Kenya, Food, Drugs and Chemical Substances Act Cap 254 of the Laws of Kenya and the Standards Act Cap 496 of the Laws of Kenya. The reality for most of these pieces of legislation is that most of these legal acts are not in conformity with current international standards and guidelines on food safety, and need to be urgently revised, updated and adapted based on the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) and good manufacturing practices (GMP). Despite these challenges, an inter-ministerial body- the National Food Safety Coordination Committee (NFSCC) was created to increase awareness about the impact of food safety and quality and initiate the revision and streamlining of all the relevant acts of Parliament. The policy gap analysis also revealed that there are bio-safety concerns over the production, importation and consumption of genetically modified foods (GMOs) in Kenya and their potential effect on the health of the population and environment in Kenya. In response, the GOK has established the National Bio-safety Act (NBA), which informs the establishment of the National Biosafety Authority (NBA) the to oversee and regulate GMOs in Kenya. However, the effectiveness of this organization is hampered by a lack of capacity and capability in addition to weak infrastructure.

Each of the agencies mentioned above have been charged with ensuring that food safety regulations in Kenya are aptly enforced to safeguard consumers and producers from harm or risk associated with the food produced, imported or sold in the country. Currently, the food safety challenges facing Kenya can be attributed to: the inability of management and other relevant stakeholders to detect potential risks and gaps, share information, plan together and identify appropriate strategies for collaborative management of food safety in the supply chain and protect the consumer and poor communication among food supply chain stakeholders. This is made worse by poor compliance with food safety requirements for local and exports markets.

[3] http://www.nation.co.ke/lifestyle/DN2/Obesity-is-on-the-rise-in-urban-areas/-/957860/2861638/-/7mdteez/-/index.html
[4] https://www.afidep.org/?wpfb_dl=80
[5] http://e-cavi.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/kenya-health-sector-strategic-investiment-plan-2013-to-2017.pdf
[6] http://ianphi.org/documents/kenyastrategyforNCDs.pdf

Conclusion and recommended policy direction

The nutrition of "Food and Nutrition Security" as put forward by existing national and international health policies and related strategic frameworks fails to link poor nutritional outcomes and health to the QUALITY and SAFETY of food produced from current agricultural food production systems, which have resulted in and manifested as malnutrition, undernourishment and obesity: obesity is a precursor to NCDs, which are on the increase and include some CANCERS. Following the critical and in depth analysis of the key national health policy documents, it is evident that a more holistic view, coupled with a requisite policy framework, for the nutrition component of food and nutrition security outcome, is urgently needed. Failure to

make requisite policy adjustments will constrain national strategic policies and priorities alignment with achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It is against this background that policy gaps, as contained in this Policy Brief, were identified after reviewing key policy documents on agriculture and health to better inform MOH policies, in liaison with the MOALF, on the importance of Ecological Organic Agriculture (EOA) as a food production systems approach/strategy to produce and consume safer and more nutritious food. The findings of the analyses point out key policy gaps on the failure to link adequate and safe nutrition with negative health outcomes:

Policy Recommendations

1. Ensure food safety and quality control by providing for regulation of food handlers including vendors.
2. At the MOH level, the departments in charge of NCDs, nutrition and dietetics, and the environmental health department, should work closely with the Ministry involved with food production: namely MOAFL, MOH and the Ministry of Trade (MOT), which is involved in food processing and food products importation, in collaboration with other relevant regulatory agencies including KeBS, KEPHIS, Government Chemist and the other stakeholders mentioned above.
3. The National Government should support and push for the domestication of international standards in food safety, at national and county level.
4. The National and County Governments should provide for a mechanism for participation in setting and development of Standards on Food Safety.
5. The National and County Government should ensure compliance to food safety standards, especially with regard to reviewing the use of the weed killer-'Roundup' also known as glyphosate.
6. The County Governments shall promote and build the capacity of staff to disseminate food safety information to the producers and consumers.
7. Establish mechanisms to raise the priority accorded to NCDs at national and county levels and to integrate their prevention and control into policies across all government sectors, in particular the MOALF, MOT and the Ministry of Environment (MOE).
8. Strengthen legislation, policies and plans for the prevention and control of NCDs at both county and national government levels and LINK them to food related policies in the MOALF.
9. Promote healthy lifestyles and implement interventions to reduce the modifiable risk factors for NCDs: unhealthy diets, physical inactivity, alcohol abuse, tobacco use and exposure to tobacco smoke.

10. Promote and conduct research and surveillance for the prevention and control of NCDs.
11. Promote sustainable local and international partnerships for the prevention and control of NCDs.
12. Strengthen effective Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) systems for NCDs and their determinants.
13. Reduce exposure to environmental, occupational and biological risk factors associated with harmful agro-chemicals, especially glyphosate.
14. Strengthen health systems for NCD prevention and control across all levels of the health sector and create linkage with the MOALF.
15. Encourage County Governments to: Promote household or community food and feed storage at 30% of the annual domestic requirements; Promote appropriate utilization of food and feedstuffs to mitigate wastage; establish mechanisms to address child malnutrition; Promote nutrition education for health; Provide for development of urban and peri-urban agriculture and promote safe storage and handling of food to control food-borne hazards.
16. Update, review and harmonize the regulatory and institutional framework to improve guidelines, coordination and enforcement, including food labeling; promote proper storage and handling to control incidents of food-related disease outbreaks.
17. Address and strengthen the range of urban food safety and quality control by formalizing and regulating producers and vendors, including safe water and sanitation.
18. Provide guidelines on the production and utilization of genetically modified products, including bio-fortified products; promote public-private sector partnerships for improved food safety and quality control and lastly develop, device and use of guidelines, codes of practice and standards that relate to food, food products and nutrition services.

References

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Kenya Vision 2030 [Online Resource] - Kenya Vision 2030 [Online Resource] Available at http://www.vision2030.go.ke/

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[7] http://ianphi.org/documents/kenyastrategyforNCDs.pdf