



Ending Hunger & Promoting Safe, Healthy & Sustainable Food in Urban Poor & Dryland Communities Through a Human Rights Based Approach

Background

Food systems across the globe have failed to nourish people adequately, resulting in widespread hunger and high levels of malnutrition. Nowhere is this failure more pronounced than in Africa. According to the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2023 (SOFI) report, nearly one-third of the world's population—about 60% in Africa and nearly 70% in Kenya—faces food insecurity (FAO et al., 2022). Urban poor populations and dryland communities are particularly more vulnerable to this crisis.

Malnutrition remains a major public health challenge in Kenyan urban informal settlements which are characterized by extreme poverty levels, poor access to basic hygiene and

Kenyans Facing Food Insecurity

70%





sanitation facilities and food insecurity. The most vulnerable groups are women, children and adolescents. Evidence shows that close to 50% of children in urban slums are stunted and that close to 80% of households are food insecure (Kimani-Murage et al., 2015). Despite the fact that many are hungry, high levels of food waste is also high particularly at the market level, due to inefficient food storage, preservation and distribution mechanisms. High levels of environmental pollution driven by poor garbage management and poor drainage also remains a challenge that is associated with poor food hygiene particularly among the urban poor.

In Africa, drylands cover 65% of the continental land area and over 81% of the Eastern Africa region with Kenya having a 75% coverage (Hitimana et al., 2021). Most of the dryland are rangelands which are areas where fodder grow naturally but is less suitable for arable farming due to low and unpredictable rainfall, poor soil fertility, rough terrains and rockiness (The Governance of Rangelands, 2012.). These rangelands provide a number of ecosystem services and account for 91% of grazing lands(Briske et al., 2017). This overreliance on the rangelands for grazing, climate change and other unsustainable land management practices has resulted in degradation of the drylands. The effect of overgrazing results in decreased fodder production, the loss of forage species, an increase in domination of herbaceous plants and bush encroachment(Angassa, 2014) which compromises the regenerative capacity leading to loss of biodiversity which poses a threat to achieving the right to food.

Our work in Kenya's drylands reveals that over 90% of households are food insecure, with insufficient dietary diversity thereby predisposing households to malnutrition . In recognition of these urgent challenges, the United Nations has declared 2021-2030 the Decade of Ecosystem Restoration, calling for global efforts to combat desertification and secure food for all.

The Zero Hunger Initiative was established against this backdrop, aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 2 (Zero Hunger), which emphasizes the critical importance of ensuring that all people have access to safe, nutritious, and sufficient food year-round—especially in the face of climate change, resource depletion, and growing economic inequality.

At its core, the initiative champions the right to food—freedom from hunger and access to adequate nutrition—grounded in both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), to which Kenya and many African nations are signatories.

In Kenya, this right is constitutionally guaranteed under Article 43(1)(c) of the Constitution (2010), which affirms every citizen's right to be free from hunger and to have access to adequate, quality food. However, this right remains a mirage for many Kenyans, particularly those living in urban poor settings and drylands. In Kenya, the Zero Hunger Initiative's primary goal is to end hunger in urban poor and dryland communities, promote safe and nutritious diets, and regenerate the environment.

Lessons and successful practices from Kenya will be shared with other African cities to expand the initiative's impact. The initiative is guided by our 2050 Food Systems Vision for Nairobi—restoring the city to “A Place of Cool Waters,” a food-secure, healthy, and environmentally sustainable urban space where all people live in peace and harmony through a regenerative, human-centered food system by 2050.



Aim and Scope

The Zero Hunger Initiative seeks to contribute to ending hunger and promoting safe, healthy diets, aligning with Sustainable Development Goal 2: Zero Hunger. The initiative focuses on Kenya and other African countries, with a special emphasis on urban poor communities and dryland areas.

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Strategic Objectives

- 🎯 **Promote Food Security & Healthy Diets:** We will promote agroecological farming practices, enhancing planetary health by fostering biodiversity and increasing vegetation. This includes planting vegetables, fruit, and nut trees across socioeconomic divides in urban areas to provide safe, healthy, and accessible food for all.
- 🎯 **Reduce Food Waste & Promote Equity:** We will reduce food waste by co-creating innovative food preservation technologies and establishing food rescue systems. These systems will collect excess food and transform it into more stable forms, extending the shelf life of perishables and redistributing them to those in need.
- 🎯 **School Feeding Programs in Urban Poor & Dryland Communities:** Recognizing the critical role of nutrition in childhood development and educational outcomes, we will promote the implementation and expansion of school feeding programs targeting children in urban informal settlements and dryland areas. In dryland communities, school feeding programs can serve as a safety net during times of drought or food crises, ensuring that children are not left behind. Additionally, the programs will be linked to local food systems, supporting smallholder farmers and local food production, further enhancing the resilience of these communities.
- 🎯 **Economic Empowerment:** We aim to economically empower urban poor communities through agribusiness, focusing on youth and women. By equipping them with tools and knowledge, we will foster sustainable livelihoods and support long-term food security.
- 🎯 **Social and Policy Change:** We seek to drive a narrative shift and reframe food as a human right, common good, and public good. Through public engagement, social behavior change communication, and policy advocacy, we will empower people to recognize their right to food and push for policy reforms that ensure just and equitable food systems. Our Zero Hunger social movement will build awareness, change behaviors, and influence policy, beginning in Kenya and expanding to other African nations.



Our Approach

Our approach blends public engagement, capacity building, community-driven interventions, applied research, and advocacy.

We aim to shift the narrative around food by advocating for universal food access, recognizing food as:

- 1. A Basic Human Right:** Food is a fundamental right, and the state must protect, respect, and fulfill this right. People should be enabled to feed themselves with dignity or be supported by the state when they cannot access food through production or purchase.
- 2. A Common Good:** Food is part of our shared cultural heritage and should be accessible through community-driven, state-supported actions that reflect collective autonomy and cooperation in the spirit of Ubuntu—"I am because we are."
- 3. A Public Good:** The state must ensure that food is available and safe for all, as part of its social contract with the citizens.

More Information

The Zero Hunger Initiative, an initiative of the African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC). APHRC is a premier research-to-policy institution, generating evidence, strengthening research and related capacity in the African research and development ecosystem, and engaging policy to inform action on health and development.

The Center is Africa-based and African-led, with its headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya, and a West Africa Regional Office (WARO), in Dakar, Senegal. APHRC seeks to drive change by developing strong African research leadership and promoting evidence-informed decision-making (EIDM) across sub-Saharan Africa.



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