



From coordination to community feedback: Assessing nature of humanitarian food aid programmes in Turkana County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

The number of people experiencing acute food insecurity is on the rise. This has been exacerbated by interconnected hunger drivers including conflict, economic shocks, poverty, and weather extremes. Turkana has been ranked as the most food insecure county in Kenya. The significant investments in humanitarian food aid call for an examination of chronic food insecurity. Researchers have explored the impact of humanitarian food aid households, food production, conflict, and the modalities of providing food aid. However, what has not been sufficiently demonstrated is the nature of humanitarian food aid programmes in achieving sustainable food security. The overall objective was to examine the nature of humanitarian food aid programmes on sustainable food security in Turkana County, Kenya. The study was anchored Maslow hierarchy of needs. The study adopted descriptive design and was conducted in Turkana County. The study targeted household heads as the primary population. The sample size of the study was 386. The study utilized probability and non-probability sampling techniques. Primary data was collected through questionnaires, KIIs, FGDs and observation checklists. Quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS version 26. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used for inferential analysis while frequencies and percentages were used for descriptive statistics. Qualitative data analysis was done using content and interpretive analysis. Data was presented in the form of tables, figures, narratives and verbatim quotations. Firstly, the study found a positive and significant correlation between coordination of humanitarian food aid programmes and whether food aid programmes met the food needs of the community with correlation coefficient (r)=0.494** and p -value=0.000. Secondly, the study found a moderately strong Correlation coefficient (r) = 0.546** and p -value=0.000 between humanitarian food aid coordination and the transparency in the selection of food aid beneficiaries. Thirdly, the correlation analysis between humanitarian food aid programmes coordination and consistency in the distribution of food aid revealed a Correlation coefficient (r)=0.256** and p -value=0.000. Finally, the correlation analysis between humanitarian food aid programmes coordination and incorporation of community feedback indicated a Correlation coefficient (r)=0.162** and p -value=0.002. The study concluded that humanitarian food aid programmes were mainly driven by the need to respond to emergencies. These programmes were instrumental in providing sustainable food security in the short and medium term and provided a platform upon which longer-term interventions can be built. Therefore, for Turkana to exit the cycle of food crisis, there is need to strengthen markets, diversify livelihood and expand social protection to foster long-term food security.

Keywords: Humanitarian Aid Programmes, Food Security, Humanitarian Food, Sustainable Food Aid Security, Turkana County

I. INTRODUCTION

The Global Report on Food Crises 2023 highlighted the number of people experiencing acute food insecurity to be on the rise (Food Security Information Network & Global Network Against Food Crises, 2023). This has been exacerbated by interconnected hunger drivers. The hunger drivers include conflict, economic shocks such as socio-economic impacts of COVID 19, poverty, and weather extremes such as drought, floods and cyclones (United Nations, 2023; European Union Civil Protection Humanitarian Aid Operation [ECHO], 2022). Countries that experience conflict such as Haiti, Syria, Yemen, the Sahel region, Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, South Sudan and Kenya remain countries of concern (European Union Civil Protection Humanitarian Aid Operation, 2022). According to the United Nations report, 783 million people experienced chronic hunger in 2022 with high prevalence in Asia, Caribbean and Africa. Hunger prevalence doubled with one in ten people affected by hunger (United Nations, 2023; World Food Programme & Food and Agriculture Organization, 2022).

Access to quality and adequate food is essential to human wellbeing. When this is not achieved, measures must be put in place by the government to support households that are not able to meet their dietary food needs. Humanitarian food aid programmes are widely used to address acute and chronic food insecurity with the goal of preventing hunger, relieving human suffering, and stabilizing food gaps (Barret & Maxwell, 2006). The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) is one of the measures used by government and humanitarian aid workers to monitor and determine the extent of food insecurity of individuals (IPC, 2023) and to inform the need for food aid. This has effectively contributed to the delivery of humanitarian food aid by addressing both acute and chronic food insecurity.

Turkana County was formed by the County Government's Act of 2012 of the Constitution of Kenya (2010). It is rich in resources yet has been historically marginalized resulting in it being one of the poor counties though the devolved governance system is playing a critical role in its development. The county receives low and erratic rainfall resulting in frequent droughts which compromise food production. Pastoralism is the main source of livelihood. Turkana County is one of the Arid and Semi-Arid Land that has continuously been targeted with humanitarian food aid programmes. The county experiences frequent disaster shocks that result in acute and chronic food insecurity characterized by malnutrition (Famine Early Warning Systems Network, 2023). Dry seasons usually intensify during the May-August lean season forcing residents to migrate to the neighboring counties for pasture and water. The most affected are usually the vulnerable groups including children, elderly, lactating mothers, and pregnant women who require support to meet their food needs (Kenya Food Security Steering Group [KFSSG], 2023; United States Agency for International Development, 2023). Studies shows that Turkana is the most food insecure county and receives many humanitarian food aid programmes (Ngasike & Gitonga, 2024; Etyang 2021; Kenya Commission on Revenue Allocation, 2011) due to frequent disasters. The county also experiences severe food insecurity in comparison to other counties, and it is considered to be a hotspot of food insecurity and severe malnutrition (IPC, 2023).

Effective coordination is widely recognized as essential for humanitarian food aid programmes. In large emergencies or protracted crises, multiple agencies are often involved in food distribution. Without coordination, there is risk of duplication in some areas and neglect of others, inefficient use of resources, and gaps in coverage. A well-coordinated response ensures timely, equitable distribution and optimal use of limited resources, thereby enhancing sustainable food security for the affected population. For example, the global Food Security Cluster, co-led by the World Food Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organization, was established to coordinate food assistance in crises and "make sure that limited resources are distributed fairly". In Kenya's drought responses, coordination mechanisms such as the Kenya Food Security Steering Group and the county-level drought committees play a pivotal role in aligning government and humanitarian efforts.

Modern humanitarian practice highlights Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP), essentially ensuring that the voices of the people receiving aid are heard and influence programme decisions. In the context of food aid, incorporating community feedback during planning and implementation can greatly improve programme relevance, effectiveness, and local ownership. Participation can take many forms: involving community members in needs assessments and decision-making, establishing feedback/complaints mechanisms, and adapting programmes based on community input. In Turkana, some NGOs have adopted participatory planning where communities help decide aspects like distribution points, timing (to avoid conflicts with livelihood activities), and whether food or cash is preferable. Ensuring that food aid programmes incorporate such local knowledge and feedback mechanisms during planning, design and implementation not only improves immediate effectiveness but also empowers communities – a key ingredient for long-term food security.

The independent variable in this study is humanitarian food aid programmes while the dependent variable is food security. Humanitarian food aid programmes can be administered through feeding programmes such as supplementary and emergency feeding programmes. These can be done through food aid strategies such as provision of in-kind food, cash and voucher assistance. Also, strengthening agriculture production through provision of training and farm inputs is a strategy integrated in some humanitarian food aid programmes to contribute to food security. When humanitarian food aid programmes are effectively implemented, they contribute to food security. Sustainable food security is determined by availability, access, and effective utilization of food for the wellbeing of the affected population.

Interventions from the government and non-governmental organizations influence sustainable food security by the nature of feeding programmes that are implemented and the respective strategies that are employed. Coordination strategies influence how effective humanitarian food aid programmes are implemented by non-governmental organizations in coordination with the government to stabilize food insecurity situations. Funding allocation, by both government and food aid donors, influences the number of food insecure people who can be reached with the food aid programmes thereby determining sustainable food security.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Turkana County is one of the Arid and Semi-Arid Land that has continuously been targeted with humanitarian food aid programmes. The county experiences frequent disaster shocks that result in acute and chronic food insecurity characterized by malnutrition (FEWS NET, 2023). Dry seasons usually intensify during the May-August lean season forcing residents to migrate to the neighboring counties for pasture and water. The most affected are usually the vulnerable groups including children, elderly, lactating mothers, and pregnant women who require support to meet their food needs (KFSSG, 2023; United States Agency for International Development, 2023).

There are several national and international non-governmental organizations working in Turkana implementing various humanitarian food aid programmes. They include Give-Directly, World Vision, Compassion International, Concern Worldwide, Action Against Hunger, Catholic Relief Services, Mary's Meals, Mercy Corps, Dorcas Aid, Care International, Oxfam, TUPADO, Anglican Development Services (NGOs Co-ordination Board, 2023) among others. For instance, Mary's Meals has been feeding more than 60,000 children from 2005 (Mary's Meals, 2022) to date through its feeding programme. The Government of Kenya, World Food Programme and other agencies distribute food aid annually in Turkana due to drought and conflict induced disasters (World Food Programme, 2024). In spite of the many food aid programmes of significant billions of shillings being implemented in Turkana County, the number of people who are food insecure continues to increase even amidst the 'Zero Hunger' SDG declaration in 2015.

Researchers have explored the impact of humanitarian food aid on food security, households, food production, conflict, and the modalities of providing food aid (Wanjiru, 2014; Zeweld, 2013; IMMAP Inc, 2023, Koppenberg, *et al.*, 2023). However, what has not been sufficiently demonstrated is the nature of humanitarian food aid programmes in achieving sustainable food security. There is also scanty information on the same about Turkana County, Kenya. Namur (2012) and Sirma (2013) recommend studies on food aid programmes and livelihoods in Turkana County to investigate food security situation in the county. Therefore, this study sought to fill this literature gap by focusing on sustainable food security in Turkana County.

1.2 Research Objective

To examine the nature of humanitarian food aid programmes in achieving sustainable food security in Turkana County, Kenya.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

The study was anchored on Maslow Hierarchy of Needs Theory. Abraham Maslow was conceived in 1943 (Willingham, 2023) to describe human behaviour (Cherry, 2024). Maslow theorized that human beings have both physical and emotional needs that must be met in order to achieve self-actualization (Anderson, 2012). Maslow provides a hierarchical pyramid of how people meet their needs starting from survival to safety, to belonging and love needs to self-esteem and finally to self-actualization (Willingham, 2023; Anderson, 2012). Food security is at the base (survival) level of the pyramid and must be met. According to this theory, survival needs such as food must be met to overcome life challenges as they endanger the right to life (Willingham, 2023).

This theory is relevant to this study since food insecurity negatively impacts individuals' ability to meet other needs and therefore food must be treated as a basic need and right (Anderson, 2012). Right to food security if not met, jeopardizes people's quest to life (Willingham, 2023). Satter (2007) provides a summary of Maslow's theory as people being able to have enough food (survival), leading to them being able to have access to acceptable food (safety), leading to reliable, ongoing access to food (belonging and love), to ability to have good-tasting food (self-esteem) and culminating to novel food and instrumental food (self-actualization).

The theory has been criticized for presenting human needs in a hierarchical manner since human needs are not hierarchical (Anderson, 2012; Willingham, 2023; Cherry, 2024). Human needs including physiological and safety needs are interrelated, and all are needed for survival. This reflects the integrated nature in which humanitarian aid programmes strive to meet several needs of people who have been affected by crisis through the various sectors.

2.2 Empirical Review

Humanitarian agencies deliver food aid to vulnerable populations during food crises caused by sudden or slow onset disasters. Food aid distribution encompasses delivering essential food items such as cereals, pulses, therapeutic food, oil and salt which are largely informed by the staples of the target population (World Food Programme, 2021^a).

Supplementary food programmes have been historically used to provide supplementary food to food insecure groups especially children under five, pregnant and/or lactating women, the elderly, people living with disabilities, chronically ill, single parents, teen parents, youth and the homeless (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2022; University of Kentucky, 2024) with the aim of improving their food and nutrition status.

Emergency food programmes are meant to supplement the diet of vulnerable groups by providing them with emergency food aid during shocks with the goal of saving life, reducing suffering and supporting early recovery (Federal Emergency Management Agency [FEMA], 2024; United States Agency for International Development, 2024). Commitments such as the Food Aid Convention (FAC) to food security is a commitment of 16 states namely Australia, Austria, Canada, Denmark, European Union, Finland, France, Japan, Republic of Korea, Luxembourg, Russia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and United States of America. These states commit to provide effective and efficient emergency food aid by ensuring quality and improving nutritional status of people affected by crisis (FAC, 2023).

Humanitarian food aid programmes are most effective when they are tailored to meet the specific needs and context of the target community. Africa's diverse communities have varied diets, livelihood strategies, and vulnerabilities. Communities in Turkana, for example, traditionally rely on livestock products (milk, meat, blood) and grains like sorghum. If food aid only provides unfamiliar foods or items that require facilities they lack, its impact diminishes. Aid that is "carefully tailored to meet the specific needs of the community" – including consideration of local food preferences and preparation methods – is more likely to be fully used and to improve nutrition. Field reports note that pastoralist communities are more receptive to food baskets including sorghum or maize-meal (which can be cooked into familiar staples) than to foods like wheat flour that they are less accustomed to. Ensuring cultural and dietary appropriateness also upholds recipients' dignity and reduces the risk of aid being resold or exchanged. A study in West Africa found that providing millet (a local staple) instead of imported rice improved acceptance of food aid and sustained household consumption patterns (Kulig *et al.*, 2013).

From the Literature Review, it is evident that despite the increase in the body of literature on the subject of food security especially in Arid and Semi-arid Lands, gaps still exist when it comes to the quest for understanding the role of humanitarian food aid in advancing sustainable food security in Turkana County. The existing literature tends to provide generalized descriptions of aid programmes without adequately classifying them by type, such as supplementary feeding programmes and emergency programmes (Akall, 2021). There is little research on coordination mechanisms between key aid stakeholders, such as INGOs, the county government and CBOs. Literature gaps exist in the role of gender, age, and disability in shaping access to and outcomes from food aid programmes, hence making these programmes to lack social inclusivity or contextual grounding needed for effective aid delivery (Ewoton *et al.*, 2023).

The literature review further revealed methodological gaps on effects of humanitarian food aid on food security. Existing studies have prioritized descriptive accounts of sustainable food security and food security discussions with little quantitative analyses to gauge the direct implications of food aid on households with a focus on diversity in diets and coping mechanisms (Gelli & Tranchant, 2018). Further, studies have tended to focus more on short-term aid outcomes thereby and not the medium and long-term effects on livelihood recovery and community resilience. There is also limited data that can paint a picture of the experiences of various demographics and social groups based on gender, age and geographic settings on food security (Gathiaka & Muriithi, 2020). This limited data is an impediment to targeted response (Price, 2020). Additionally, aid dependency and behavioral changes in local communities such as shifts in labor patterns or market engagement are often overlooked in research (Pozarny, 2016).

III. METHODOLOGY

The study utilised descriptive research designs to understand the research problem before investigating why it even happens (Bouchrika, 2023). Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) state that descriptive design attempts to collect data from the members of the population to determine their status with respect to study variables. Descriptive design helps in making observations and detailed documentation of phenomenon of interest (Bhattacharjee, 2019).

The study was conducted in Turkana County which is the second largest county in Kenya after Marsabit County with a land area of 71,597.8km². It borders Uganda to the west, South Sudan to the northwest and Ethiopia to the northeast. Neighboring counties are West Pokot, Baringo and Samburu, while Marsabit County is on the opposite (i.e., eastern) shore of Lake Turkana. Turkana County has six sub counties with 30 wards namely: Turkana North which has six wards, Turkana West which has seven wards, Turkana Central which has five wards, Loima which has four wards, Turkana South which has five wards, and Turkana East with three wards. Studies shows that Turkana is the most food insecure county and receives many humanitarian food aid programmes (Ngasike & Gitonga, 2024); Etyang 2021; Kenya Commission on Revenue Allocation, 2011) due to frequent disasters. The county also experiences severe food insecurity and it is considered to be a hotspot of food insecurity and severe malnutrition (IPC, 2023).

The study population comprised two distinct but interconnected groups that collectively provide comprehensive perspectives on the effectiveness of humanitarian food aid programmes in achieving sustainable food security in Turkana County. The Primary Population consisted of Household Heads in Turkana County who represent the direct recipients and intended beneficiaries of humanitarian food aid programmes. According to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS, 2019), Turkana County has 164,519 households distributed across six sub-counties, with a total population of 926,976 people. These household heads serve as the primary unit of analysis because they are typically the decision-

makers regarding food procurement, consumption patterns, and livelihood strategies, and are therefore best positioned to provide insights into how food aid programmes affect household food security over time.

The Secondary Population comprised Key Institutional Stakeholders who play critical roles in the design, implementation, coordination, and oversight of humanitarian food aid programmes in Turkana County. This population included county government officials responsible for disaster management and food security policy (County Commissioner, County Secretary, Director of Public Service and Disaster Management, Director of Nutrition and Dietetics, Chief Officers for Administration and Disaster Management, and Chief Officer Agriculture and Land Reclamation), local administrative leaders who interface directly with communities (Chiefs and Assistant Chiefs), institutional implementers of food aid programmes (directors and program managers from international NGOs, faith-based organizations, and community-based organizations operating in Turkana County), and educational sector representatives (head teachers from schools implementing feeding programmes). These stakeholders provide essential perspectives on programme design rationale, implementation challenges, coordination mechanisms, policy frameworks, and observed impacts from institutional viewpoints.

Turkana was purposely selected for the study due to the high number of humanitarian food aid programmes that have been implemented in the county as a result of food insecurity. The researcher specifically targeted Turkana South and Turkana Central as the sub-counties of study since they rank 2nd and 3rd sub-counties most affected by food insecurity respectively (KFSSG, 2023). While Turkana East is the most food insecure sub-county, the food insecurity situation is mainly due to frequent cattle raiding and there is limited presence of humanitarian food aid organizations (Sirma, 2013; KFSSG, 2023). Therefore, these may limit comprehensive examination and analysis of the study variables. According to the KFSSG Report (2023), the hotspot wards are Kalapata, Lokichar, Kaputir, Katilu and Lobokat in Turkana South while the hotspot wards in Turkana Central are Kerio, Kangatotha and Kanamkemer in order of severity. Turkana being wide and sparsely populated, the researcher targeted two wards from each of the target sub-counties based on their food insecurity ranking. Patton (2014) states that purposive sampling can be used for identification and selection of information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources. The identified individuals or groups should be knowledgeable about a phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). As such, respondents from households were drawn from all the sub-locations in Kalapata, Lokichar, Kerio and Kangatotha wards.

Households were sampled from the four wards and their respective sub-locations were part of the study. Since the unit of analysis was households, the sample size was determined using Yamane (1967) method which established a sample size of 386 from a population of 16,065 and considered a five percent margin of error. The sample size was proportionately distributed in the four wards and their respective sub-locations. Mishra and Alok (2011) states that proportionate sampling can be used to apportion the sample size to different groups in a study. Purposive sampling was used to sample county government officials, local administrative leaders, institutional implementers and educational sectors who responded. This led to a total of 20 key informant interviews being completed and 8 focus group discussions.

Data analysis involved both qualitative and quantitative techniques. The quantitative data was analysed through descriptive statistics like percentages and frequencies (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). Data was analysed using SPSS version 26. SPSS was used to produce inferential and descriptive statistics. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used for inferential analysis whereas descriptive statistics in the form of frequencies and percentages were used. Qualitative data analysis was done using content and interpretive analysis for comprehensive description to provide insight into the study. Qualitative data was transcribed before coding into categories and then organized into thematic areas related to the research objectives. Generalization of the findings from the various data collection instruments was conducted. Data was presented in the form of tables and graphs to present the relationships between variables. Qualitative data was presented in narratives form and through verbatim quotation of respondents.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Findings

The study sought to establish the nature of Humanitarian Food Aid Programmes in Turkana County. The findings were as shown in Table 1 and discussed in the subsequent sub-sections.

Table 1*Nature Humanitarian Food Aid Programmes in Turkana County*

Nature Humanitarian Food Aid Programmes in Turkana County	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Humanitarian food aid programmes in Turkana County are well-coordinated.	59 (16.8%)	45 (12.8%)	102 (29.1%)	74 (21.1%)	71 (20.2%)
Food aid programmes are tailored to meet the specific needs of the community.	19 (5.4%)	61 (17.4%)	116 (33.0%)	102 (29.1%)	53 (15.1%)
The selection of beneficiaries for food aid is done transparently.	29 (8.3%)	51 (14.5%)	110 (31.3%)	100 (28.5%)	61 (17.4%)
There is consistency in the distribution of food aid in Turkana County.	43 (12.3%)	68 (19.4%)	111 (31.6%)	93 (26.5%)	36 (10.3%)
Food aid programmes incorporate community feedback during planning and implementation.	47 (13.4%)	62 (17.7%)	96 (27.4%)	100 (28.5%)	46 (13.1%)

4.1.1 Coordination of Humanitarian Food aid Programmes in Turkana County

The study sought to establish whether the coordination of humanitarian food aid programmes in Turkana County was well done. The findings revealed that out of the 351 respondents, 59 (16.8%) strongly disagreed and 45 (12.8%) disagreed. Meanwhile, 102 (29.1%) remained neutral. On the positive side, 74 (21.1%) agreed and 71 (20.2%) strongly agreed that humanitarian food aid programmes were well-coordinated. These findings therefore revealed that majority of the household heads perceived coordination of Humanitarian food aid positively, with a cumulative percentage of 41.3% agreeing and strongly agreeing. In this regard, it is safe to say that coordination of humanitarian food aid was well done in the county. The findings from the household heads were corroborated by those from Interviews. During interview with an Official from Kenya Redcross Turkana, it was stated that:

“Coordination is a key component of the type of work we done. For example, in this County, we have County Steering Group (CSG) where we normally have coordination meetings co-chaired by the County Governor and the County Commissioner with the National Drought Management Authority (NDMA) playing the role of secretariat. In such coordination meetings, we as Red Cross normally share the data that we have collected through the surveys that we normally do. Some of the surveys that we conduct include the Kenya food security surveys, long term and long-range assessment which guide us in terms of how we can respond and where we are going to respond. Coordination is because when you look at the county level in terms of the partners, everybody has his own strength and his own capacity” (Interview with Kenya Red Cross Official in Turkana County, 30th May 2025).

These findings were further supported by Turkana County office of disaster management. During interviews at the directorate of disasters management, it emerged that the county government does a lot of coordination works with other stakeholders dealing with issues of food distribution and other aspects of humanitarian work in the county. In terms of coordination, the county coordinates all the humanitarian aid efforts or responses that are within the county. That is in terms of all the partners that are undertaking programmes that deal with humanitarian work. That is, County government coordinates with various stakeholders by calling them to forums where each organization states their sectoral support and hence can provide particular forms of aid for various vulnerable groups that need help. Through such coordination meetings various organizations under the leadership of the county government through the disaster management office agree on areas of coverage for various organizations so that the stakeholders operate harmoniously. The Disaster management office in the County also coordinates various sectors that deal with humanitarian aid of any kind and those county departments that handle issues of food security including directorate of Agriculture as well as directorate of nutrition within the county.

The findings were further supported by a key informant from World Vision Kenya who emphasized that coordination was an essential part of Humanitarian work in Turkana County. He indicated that the coordination was wholesome and cutting across all projects including food aid, emergency responses and, cash interventions among others. He added that:

“At the county level, there is what we call the County Steering Group (CSG). The county commissioner and the governor co-chair and then the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) are the secretaries. They take minutes and are the ones that invite stakeholders. Therefore, all humanitarian stakeholders, including government and all duty bearers, are members of the CSG. This is a top-notch thing at the county level because the county governor and the county commissioner are the chairing and the members. In essence, they are supposed to be the managers of those organizations involved in Humanitarian work within the County. The CSG meetings happen once a month. Additionally, for the food aid actors, if you are a new organization and you've stepped in Turkana, first of all you have to pay your

visit to the county secretary or the Governor himself to introduce your organization, and of course, with an introductory letter and sign an Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) because the county needs to know what exactly are you going to handle. This has helped in coordination and to reduce double registration or what we sometimes call double-dipping” (Interview with World Vision-Kenya Official in Turkana County, 2nd June 2025).

The findings of this study agreed with a publication by Humanitarian Coalition (2024) which indicated that like other elements of a humanitarian response, the delivery of nutritionally appropriate food items to populations in need requires coordination between different participating agencies, in order to ensure no work is duplicated and that the priority is focused on meeting the greatest needs of the most vulnerable. This was further aligned with a publication by the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (2021) which indicated that Humanitarian coordination seeks to improve the effectiveness of humanitarian response by ensuring greater predictability, accountability and partnership. Further adding that coordination in humanitarian contexts is vital at local, national, regional and global levels, and involving; Assessing situations and needs; Agreeing on common priorities; Fill gaps, prevents duplication and targets those most in need; Developing common strategies to address issues such as negotiating access; Mobilizing funding and other resources; Clarifying consistent public messaging; and Monitoring progress.

From the foregoing it is important to note that effective coordination is widely recognized as an essential part of humanitarian food aid programmes. This means that without proper coordination, there is risk of duplication in some areas and neglect of other areas, wasteful resources utilization, and gaps in coverage. A well-coordinated emergency response ensures timely, equitable distribution and optimal utilization of scarce resources, thus enhancing food security for the affected populace. For instance, Coordination is so important that at the global level, the Global Food Security Cluster was established and is led by the leading international organizations namely the World Food Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organization with the mandate to coordinate food assistance in crises and to ensure scarce resources are distributed both equally and equitably.

In reality, this means harmonization of efforts such as food distribution, supplementary feeding, and cash transfers programmes under a common strategy so that all vulnerable people are able to get aid. Coordination is also important in complex emergencies, especially in volatile environments involving both conflict and drought such as Turkana. There are multiple clusters including food security, nutrition, and logistics which must work in concert. Coordination helps maximize reach and consistency, reduce redundancy, and ensure that humanitarian aid contributes positively to food security rather than being ad hoc or uneven. Coordination remains a continuous challenge, however, especially when numerous agencies and donors are involved, but it is a cornerstone of effective food aid.

4.1.2 Food Aid Programmes and Specific Needs of the Community

The study sought to establish whether food aid programmes in Turkana County are tailored to meet the specific needs of the community. Among the 351 household heads, 19 (5.4%) strongly disagreed and 61 (17.4%) disagreed, 116 (33.0%) remained neutral while 102 (29.1%) agreed and 53 (15.1%) strongly agreed that food aid programmes were indeed responsive to community’s specific needs. In this regard, there was a general positive perception among the household heads that the food provided through humanitarian aid met the specific needs.

The findings were supported by various key informants who indicated that the food that was provided was meant to meet community needs and provide the food security that was desired at that moment when the aid was provided. An official from the County Government of Turkana indicated that:

“While providing food we look at the immediate needs of the community and provide aid according to what is needed. In many cases during the food distribution exercises, we majorly provided maize, pulses and vegetable oil. This can help the community members get started as there are always other coping mechanisms including slaughtering of goats which sometimes comes in handy as a way of helping the community to cope. The food provided through aid always comes in handy to cope with food insecurity” (Interview with Turkana County Official on June, 2nd 2025).

The findings were in line with the World Food Programme (2021) reports which indicated that modern food assistance initiatives use tools such as vulnerability analysis and mapping (VAM) and community-based targeting to ensure that interventions are relevant and responsive to local realities. In this regard, tailoring food aid begins with comprehensive needs assessments that consider the demographic structure, local food preferences, market dynamics, and prevailing health conditions of the target population.

Gentilini (2016) further avers that in contexts where markets are functional, cash-based transfers have become a preferred modality over direct food distributions. These transfers allow recipients to purchase food of their choice, promoting dignity, dietary diversity, and local economic development (Gentilini, 2016). For example, in Somalia and South Sudan, humanitarian agencies have successfully integrated cash and voucher systems to support household food security while minimizing market distortion (Maxwell & Hailey, 2021).

Moreover, Christian *et al.* (2015) argued that cultural and nutritional considerations are increasingly influencing the food basket compositions. Christian *et al.* (2015) emphasizes the importance of aligning food aid with the local diet to enhance acceptability and nutritional outcomes. In regions with high rates of malnutrition, specialized nutritious foods such as ready-to-use therapeutic foods (RUTFs) and fortified blended foods are provided to address specific deficiencies among vulnerable groups. Community participation in the design and monitoring of food aid programmes also ensures alignment with local priorities. Active involvement of community leaders and beneficiaries enhances accountability, improves targeting, and strengthens community ownership of the intervention (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2023).

4.1.3 Transparency in the Selection of Beneficiaries for Food Aid

The study sought to know whether there was transparency in the selection of beneficiaries during the humanitarian food aid programmes. Among the 351 Household heads, 29 (8.3%) strongly disagreed and 51 (14.5%) disagreed, 110 (31.3%), were neutral, However, 100 (28.5%) agreed and 61 (17.4%) strongly agreed that the selection of beneficiaries is done transparently. Based on these findings, it is evident that more than 45% of the household heads viewed the beneficiary selection process as transparent.

These findings were supported by key informants who indicated that there were several factors considered in the beneficiary selection and that every person who deserved the aid received it. During an interview with an Official from Kenya Redcross in Lodwar she explained that:

“Beneficiaries are selected through a platform where they all have been registered. We have something called Single Registration platform or one to one platform. In this platform, you have, every beneficiary with his or her own unique identifier. It cannot have double entries because once you have been entered into the system, I can see you because your ID is different and your number is different, even if you are going to share names, but those two are unique, and hence it helps keep the process transparent” (Interview with Kenya Red Cross Official in Turkana County, 30th May 2025).

These findings were further supported during an interview that was conducted with World Vision Kenya Official who stated that not in only food aid but that in all humanitarian programmes, there is an established way of beneficiary selection which is well established and transparent. She added that in 2019 through UNICEF, funding partners and the government through the Ministry of Labour, Social Services and Social Protection was supported to create what was called enhanced single registry. This is a single registry for all beneficiaries. It is called HSNP (Household Safety Net Programme).

There is HSNP 1 and HSNP 2. For those registered under HSNP-1, a specific amount of about 2,700 Kenya Shillings is disbursed every month by the government. This is the so called *Pesa ya Wazee* (Financial support for the elderly). This is meant for the poor and vulnerable elderly people as a way of social protection by the government. There is also HSNP-2, in this category all registered individuals can get aid only when there is a calamity or maybe a disaster, and it has to be triggered, and the single registry is updated. The findings were further supported by an official from the County Commissioner's office who revealed that:

“Since 2022 this single registry was updated and every NGO and every stakeholder who comes in to do any form of humanitarian work in Turkana County has to get access and use the database for any form of humanitarian aid. NGOs or stakeholders do not go to register people for food aid but rather use the data that already exists in the registry to provide aid to the beneficiaries. The data is always available to these organizations at the Deputy County Commissioners offices in every sub-county as well as the Department of Children Services. Every NGO seeking this data has to request officially so that the data is sent to their national director and such data has to be protected to avoid any violations of data protection regulations” (Interview at the County Commissioners Office, 30th May, 2025).

These findings were also echoed by the Chief Officer for Administration and Disaster Management who indicated that in regard to selection of beneficiaries, all that the NGOs can do is verify the data they have once they are on the ground. The validation is done using data from the single registry provided by the National Government. Further adding that, the beauty of using the single registry is that it shows how the beneficiaries have been given aid and as such there is no chance of a person getting the aid twice. All people in the registry get the aid meant for them equally because any double entries would automatically reflect. The integrity of the single registry therefore is helpful in ensuring transparent aid distribution in Turkana County because there is only one database used by both the Government and Non-Governmental Organizations. The enhanced single registry is also online and can be seen by all stakeholders involved in humanitarian Aid.

The findings are in line with Camacho (2022) who opined that, in many humanitarian settings, transparency is also supported by public disclosure of beneficiary lists, grievance redress systems, and the use of mobile technologies for registration and communication. These innovations enhance accountability and enable communities to contest unfair

selections or report corruption. For instance, digital platforms like SCOPE used by World Food Programme allow real-time tracking and verification of recipients, which helps reduce duplication and fraud (World Food Programme, 2021^b).

It is however important to note that, despite these efforts, challenges persist. In some fragile or conflict-affected areas, local elites or political actors may interfere with beneficiary selection to reward loyalty or punish dissent (Maxwell & Hailey, 2021). In such cases, even when formal processes exist, transparency may be undermined by power dynamics, limited oversight, or weak community engagement. Additionally, illiteracy, language barriers, and limited awareness can prevent beneficiaries from understanding or engaging with the selection process (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2023).

4.1.4 Consistency in the Distribution of Food Aid in Turkana County

The study sought to establish whether there was consistency in the Distribution of Food Aid in Turkana County. Among the 351 household heads, 43 (12.3%) strongly disagreed and 68 (19.4%) disagreed, 111 (31.6%) were neutral. Meanwhile, 93 (26.5%) agreed and 36 (10.3%) strongly agreed that food aid distribution was consistent. These findings pointed to a divided perception, with a tendency toward neutrality or skepticism regarding consistent delivery of aid.

These findings were in line with those from key informants who argued that majority of the food aid was provided during emergencies such drought or floods. The lack of consistency was also occasioned by funding issues that had limited the amount of food aid that could be distributed. The major distributor of food aid in Turkana County is the Government of Turkana which works closely with other stakeholders in food in the process of food aid distribution in the County. According to the County Secretary of Turkana County, there is always a budgetary allocation for humanitarian food aid in the budget of the County Government every financial year. He averred that:

“Food aid in this County is normally provided through a fund that is in the budget and is allocated every financial year. For instance, in the financial year 2024/2025 the County allocated up to 550 million Kenya Shillings for only Relief Food. The allocation is always made in the budget, and that is the budget we normally run for this humanitarian food aid. We procure food then distribute it to all the beneficiaries across the county. For instance, in the stated financial year, we were able to distribute food and feed 102,000 households across the whole county. So basically, that is what we do in terms of trying to provide food to residents of Turkana” (Interview with County Secretary Turkana County, 30th May 2025).

In another Interview with the Director of Public Service and Disaster Management, he stated that food distribution was done at a designated time and was only done once every financial year by the County Government. He stated that the budget normally targets the beneficiaries for a one-off kind of distribution and that it was impossible for the county provide aid monthly or periodically due to financial constraints. He pointed out that the recent Trump Policies of aid had further crimped aid programmes in the County as one of the major donors was the USA Government through the United States Agency for International Development which has since been shut down and was no longer working in the County. It was however noted from the interview that the County Government was still in partnership with several organizations that were offering food aid and that when there was an emergency various NGOs would collaborate to provide aid. Plate1 Shows the Food Distribution exercise that was coordinated by the County Government of Turkana.



Plate 1

Food Distribution Exercise Coordinated by the County Government of Turkana

The director further pointed out Mary's Meals which worked closely with the County Government through the Directorate of Early Childhood Education to provide food aid to school going child in Early Childhood Institutions. He pointed out that Mary's Meals were consisted during school calendar and they always ensured that Children in school are well fed with nutritious meals while in school. These sentiments were supported by the coordinator Kenya Red cross who argued that:

"In regard to consistency, we don't provide aid except during drought or in case of a disaster. We know the County Government has a budget for food distribution, but for us it's always for the purposes of emergency response, so when we talk about consistency it has to do with the consistency of the disaster being responded to. For example, we can do in-kind food distribution or cash transfers. This kind of programme can run for about six to one year depending on the duration of the drought. When the disaster comes to an end, our programme on this particular response ends as well until another emergency occurs that needs such an intervention" (Interview with Kenya Red Cross Official in Turkana County, 30th May 2025).

According to the World Food Programme (2010), timely and predictable food assistance is essential for saving lives and building resilience in food-insecure communities. When aid is delivered erratically or halted altogether, the consequences are immediate and severe. For instance, households may resort to skipping meals, selling productive assets, or migrating in search of food. For example, inconsistent food distribution has been linked to rising child malnutrition and increased dependency on harmful coping mechanisms (Camacho, 2022). Among the most significant barriers to consistent food aid delivery are funding shortfalls. Humanitarian agencies depend heavily on donor contributions, which are often volatile and earmarked for short-term interventions. According to World Food Programme reports, fluctuating donor commitments lead to pipeline break periods when food supplies run out before the next tranche of funding is received. This unpredictability compromises aid schedules and undermines trust between aid providers and communities (World Food Programme, 2021).

In further agreement with the study findings Osendarp *et al.* (2025) averred that proven programmes, such as community-based management of severe acute malnutrition, which combine screening, treatment and counselling, can reduce mortality to below 5% and have been used in more than 70 countries. In 2022, the United States and other donors reporting to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development spent \$591 million on severe-wasting treatment, which was matched by receiving countries. The abrupt withdrawal of donor support by the Trump

administration in 2025 leaves millions of critically ill children without access to these life-saving programmes. It is already undermining the institutional capacity, expertise and data infrastructures required to deliver essential nutrition services.

For example, in Nigeria, withdrawal of the United States Agency for International Development Advancing Nutrition funding has meant that the charity Helen Keller International has had to stop a programme that provides nutrition services for 5.6 million children (Osendarp *et al.*, 2025). In Sudan, almost 80% of emergency food kitchens are closed. In Ethiopia, supplies of nutrient-rich foods used to treat around one million severely malnourished children annually ran out by May 2025. The global FEWS-NET network, a leading source of data on famine risks sits idle, disrupting early-warning systems for humanitarian planning and emergency resource allocation. Loss of donor funding is also jeopardizing the procurement and distribution of ready-to-use therapeutic food, a life-saving treatment for severe acute malnutrition (Osendarp *et al.*, 2025). The product comes as a dense micronutrient paste that contains peanuts, milk powder, sugar, oils, vitamins and minerals. The United States Agency for International Development supported half of the world's food aid supply.

4.1.5 Food Aid Programmes Incorporate Community Feedback during Planning and Implementation

The study sought to establish whether food aid programmes in Turkana County incorporated community feedback during their planning and implementation phases. In this study 351 household heads gave varied responses which included 47 (13.4%) strongly disagreed and 62 (17.7%) disagreed, 96 (27.4%) were neutral, whereas, 100 (28.5%) agreed and 46 (13.1%) strongly agreed that community feedback was incorporated.

These findings reveal a mix of perceptions. However, from the statistics it is evident that cumulatively 41.6% gave a positive response as compared to the cumulative 31.1% who did not agree or strongly disagreed. This is an indication that majority of household heads confirmed that members of the community were indeed engaged to provide feedback on issues of food aid. The findings were consistent with those from Key Informant Interviews. In an Interview with an Official from Mary's Meals, it emerged that there was a lot of feedback that was coming from the community throughout the process of planning and even during implementation of the food aid programmes. The Official stated that;

“Our programme is mainly for feeding Children in Kindergarten or Early Childhood Education. Food aid programmes are normally done within schools, and we engage with members of the community, the schools and even the Children. For instance, we made some changes to our menu recently and before we did the changes, we had engagements with both our school feeding communities and got feedback also from the children themselves because they are our biggest beneficiaries. We have also had engagements with other stakeholders and weighed in with what other partners within the county are giving” (Interview with an Official from Mary's Meals, May 31, 2025).

The Official further added that there was open communication and feedback with members of the community as they sought more time and friendly ways of dealing with various challenges that could affect the school feeding programme that they were running. Additionally, the school feeding programme was integral to the community and as such the community members were engaged in providing support to the programme in different ways. For example, the official from Mary's Meals stated that they always sought ways to deal with various challenges such as shortage of water. They also engaged with the community on how they could make it easy for the community to ensure feeding continues. Further stating that providing the meals is sometimes not enough because community support is needed through provisions of other resources such as firewood, milk, and water. Mary's Meals held community engagement meetings to receive feedback, get the opinions of the community members and also seek community volunteers who could help with cooking for the children in school. This was basically through the feedback from the communities through the community engagements meetings.

4.1.6 Correlations among Various Components of Humanitarian Food Aid Delivery in Turkana County

In this study, correlation analyses on various components of Humanitarian food aid delivery in Turkana County was conducted. A Pearson's Correlation Coefficient Analysis was used to generate a 2-tail Bivariate Pearson's correlations tables from the SPSS data set. The statistics included correlation coefficients (r) and probability values (p -values) or significance indices, for analysis and interpretation of both positive and inverse (negative) covariance. The results of the correlation analysis were as shown in



Table 2
Correlation Analyses among Various Components of Humanitarian Food Aid Delivery in Turkana County

		Correlations				
		Humanitarian food aid programmes	Food aid programmes to meet the needs of the community	Transparency in food aid beneficiary selection	Consistency in the distribution of food aid	Food aid programmes incorporate community feedback
Humanitarian food aid programmes	Pearson Correlation	1	.494**	.546**	.256**	.162**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.002
	N	351	351	351	351	351

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Pearson correlation analysis revealed the following statistically significant relationships with p-value set at 0.05 level, 2-tailed. The correlation analysis revealed that with regard to the between Coordination of humanitarian food aid programme and whether Food aid programmes met the needs of the community, there was Pearson Correlation coefficient (r) = 0.494** and p-value=0.000 indicating a there was a moderate positive correlation between the coordination of humanitarian food aid programmes and the perception that these programmes meet the specific needs of the community. The relationship was statistically significant with the p-value set at 0.05 level ($p < 0.05$). This means that as coordination improves, households were more likely to believe that food aid is tailored to community needs.

The Correlation analysis between Humanitarian food aid programmes and Transparency in food aid beneficiary selection indicate that there was a Pearson Correlation coefficient (r) = 0.546** and p-value=0.000. This was an indication that there was a moderately strong positive correlation between Humanitarian food aid coordination and the transparency in the selection of food aid beneficiaries. This correlation is statistically significant with the p-value set at 0.05 level ($p < 0.05$). It suggests that better coordination is strongly associated with increased trust and clarity in how beneficiaries are identified for food aid.

The Correlation analysis between Humanitarian food aid programmes coordination and Consistency in the distribution of food aid, there was a Pearson Correlation coefficient (r) = .256** and p-value=0.000. This shows that there was a weak but positive correlation between the coordination of humanitarian food aid programmes and the consistency of food distribution. This correlation is statistically significant with the p-value set at 0.05 level ($p < 0.05$). This indicates that while coordination plays a role in ensuring consistent distribution, other factors may also influence the consistency of aid.

Finally, the Correlation analysis between Humanitarian food aid programmes coordination and Food aid programmes incorporate community feedback indicate that there was a Pearson Correlation coefficient (r)= 0.162** and p-value=0.002. This indicates a weak positive correlation between coordination and the extent to which food aid programmes incorporate community feedback during planning and implementation. This correlation is statistically significant with the p-value set at 0.05 level ($p < 0.05$). Although the correlation is small, it suggests that well-coordinated humanitarian food aid programmes are slightly more likely to engage communities in the decision-making process.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The study concludes that the nature of humanitarian food aid programmes revealed that these interventions were mainly driven by the need to respond to emergencies and were often reactive and emergency-driven, largely shaped by cyclical droughts and famine which affected Turkana County. The programmes were majorly supported by international donors and NGOs, operated in coordination with County Government and the National Government through the National Drought management Authority (NDMA) to deliver short-term food relief. These humanitarian food aid Programmes were instrumental providing food security in Turkana County in the short and medium term. The programmes saved lives and alleviated suffering by reducing hunger and malnutrition, and it provided a platform upon which other longer-term interventions can be built. Therefore, For Turkana to exit the cycle of crisis, a gradual shift must occur from reliance on humanitarian aid to resilience and self-reliance. That entails strengthening markets and incomes and expanding social protection in a way that eventually reduces the need for emergency handouts.

5.2 Recommendation

The study recommends transition from emergency-focused interventions to long-term resilience. Humanitarian actors and the government should invest in integrated resilience programming. This includes scaling up livelihood

support initiatives, promoting agro-pastoral practices suitable for arid areas, and enhancing coordination frameworks that embed development actors alongside humanitarian responders. The National and County Governments should also adopt a phased exit strategy from aid dependency by strengthening food systems and income-generating activities at the community level.

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