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## RESILIENCE IN THE FACE OF STARVATION: Coping Strategies for Food Security among Women in Kenya

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### Abstract

Food insecurity in Kenya has been a big challenge amongst many households. In the pursuit of family survival in situations where the family granaries are empty, women are known to bear the most responsibility in ensuring that family members do not starve to death. The key question is how they cope in such situations despite high poverty levels and marginalization in society. The framework of focus was Article 43 (1)(c) of the Constitution of Kenya (2010), which states that “everybody should be free from hunger at all times, and have food of acceptable quality”. Nevertheless, despite this recognition, more than 10 million Kenyans continue to experience chronic hunger –some to the point of starvation and

death, particularly in the arid and semi-arid areas of Kenya. This paper, therefore, seeks to examine the coping strategies adopted by women when threatened by food shortages. It also explores the models of resilience and adaptation to hunger amongst 597 women in 15 counties in Kenya. The data was collected by the African Women’s Study Centre (University of Nairobi) using both quantitative and qualitative methods with a key purpose to document their experiences in food security. The results revealed that women depend on various coping strategies and it is anticipated that these findings can be used to inform future policies and programmes for interventions on food insecurity.

**Key Terms:** Food Security, Women, Coping Strategies, Resilience and Adaptation

### 8.1 Introduction

Many countries in sub-Saharan Africa have experienced trying times with regard to food shortages resulting from variable climate, drought and displacement due to wars and insecurity. Trying to cope with hunger during such times, therefore, becomes necessary and urgent strategies are then required for accessing food. Although at the heart of every human experience is the desire to survive and prosper, statistics reveal that every

3.6 seconds, a person dies of starvation. Usually, these will be children who die before 5 years of age<sup>1</sup>. Six million children die from malnutrition before celebrating their fifth birthday. Although Kenya is on the road to economic growth, poverty alleviation remains a challenge. Nearly half of the country’s estimated 43 million people live below the poverty line and are, therefore, unable to meet their daily nutritional requirements. Poverty

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<sup>1</sup>UNICEF (2005)

and food insecurity are particularly acute in the country's arid and semi-arid lands, which have been severely affected by recurrent droughts. Faced with continuous food shortages, households are forced to develop coping strategies to handle these food shortages. A further challenge is acquiring their preferred food stuffs which may not always be available. This forces the women to resort to survival strategies that seemed to have worked for them in the past.

According to the *Rural Poverty Report* by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), 2011, food insecurity in Kenya has proved to be a major challenge amongst many households. It is well documented that the majority of rural households depend on agriculture for most of their income. But what happens when the household granaries are empty? Women, being responsible to cook the food for the family, are known to bear the most responsibility to ensure that members of their households do not starve to death. The key question is how do they cope with such situations despite the high poverty and marginalization levels registered amongst them?

In Kenya, about 25 percent of the population are hard-hit by food insecurity, with other areas also experiencing varying levels of food insecurity as well. Given the documented hunger threats, especially in the arid and semi-arid areas, my emphasis is that there exists an underlying survival mechanism that operates to ensure family survival, from one threat of starvation to another or from one day to the next where poverty and marginalization of women is common.

This paper investigates the coping strategies amongst women when threatened by food shortages. The investigation revealed the stamina demonstrated by women as they struggle to ensure that the members of their family make it through very hard times of hunger, relying on certain specific coping strategies and mechanisms. The paper, therefore, explores what certain models of resilience and adaptation to hunger and coping strategies are adopted by women in different counties in Kenya.

## 8.2 Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

The Resilience theory is a multidimensional field of study that has been addressed by social workers, psychologists, sociologists, educators (amongst others) over the past few decades. According to psychologists, resilience is the process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances.<sup>2</sup> It is also defined as a predication on exposure to significant threat or adversity, and on the attainment of good outcomes despite this exposure.<sup>3</sup> This study adopts the definition of "resilience" as: the result of individuals being able to interact with their environments and the processes that either promote well-being or protect them against the overwhelming influence of risk factors.<sup>4</sup> These processes include individual coping strategies, or assistance from other families, schools, communities, or social policies that make resilience more likely to occur. In this sense

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<sup>2</sup> Masten, Best & Garmezy (1990).

<sup>3</sup> Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker (2000)

<sup>4</sup> Zautra, Hall, J.S. & Murray, K.E. (2010)

"resilience" occurs when there are such factors. It further assumes that resilience is a strength-based construct, meaning its focus is on providing the developmental supports and opportunities (protective factors) that promote success, rather than on eliminating the factors that promote failure.<sup>49</sup>

Sidama Zone and Regassa (2011) examined the small holder farmers' coping strategies to sustained household food insecurity and hunger in Ethiopia. The results showed that households employed a number of strategies to cope including: minimizing the number of meals and amount of food consumption and out-migration of household members during chronic food shortage. Other scholars have identified different coping strategies. For instance, Longhurst, (2009) and Arun (2006) posit that the most important seasonal strategies include choice of cropping patterns to spread risks involving mixed cropping, cultivation of secondary crops, particularly root crops, off-farm income earning, selling productive assets, constricting food intake and migration. On the other hand,<sup>6</sup> cites use of common property resources, changes in consumption patterns, share-rearing of livestock, and mutual support networks as food insecurity coping strategies at the households' level.

In a study conducted in Southern Sudan, Ververs (2010) identified some common coping mechanisms used by the smallholder farming communities such as eating immature crops, reducing the size and number of meals, consuming less-preferred foods, increasing collection and consumption of wild foods. Similarly, a study in an informal settlement in South Africa identified cooking a limited variety of foods, maternal buffering by limiting the

caregiver's intake to make food available for the children, skipping of meals and limiting portion sizes as commonly used coping strategies<sup>56</sup>

An investigation conducted in the three most deprived and poverty-stricken regions in the Northern parts of Ghana showed that households use a wide range of mechanisms and communal support networks to cope<sup>7</sup>. These mechanisms included, collection of wild foods, market purchases, in-kind (food) payment, support from relatives and friends, sales from livestock and household valuables, migration and wage labour, reduction in the number of meals served each day, reduction in the portions/sizes of meals and consumption of less preferred foods. According to Olielo (2013) some of the coping strategies among the food poor households are abandoning the responsibility of paying debts, trespassing, engaging in crime, corruption, stealing, prostitution, selling voter's cards, seeking financial assistance from government or nongovernment organizations, migrating and waiting for food aid or death by starvation.

A study was carried out by Zalilah and Geok (2008) in Malaysia to assess household food insecurity amongst low-income rural communities and to examine its association with demographic and socio-economic factors. The study also examined the coping strategies used to minimize food insecurity. The results of this study revealed that borrowing money to buy food, receiving foods from family members, relatives and neighbours and reducing the number of meals to a large extent

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<sup>5</sup><http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/road-resilience.aspx>

<sup>6</sup>Wilna, Emsieand Carin 2006)

<sup>7</sup>(Wilhelmina, 2008)

cushioned the food insecure households from experiencing food insufficiency. Moreover, most of the food insecure households adopted the strategy on cooking whatever was available at home for their consumption.

A study by Gray and Gash (2014) was conducted in Rural Burkina Faso. Its focus was to make efforts to examine the degree of resilience amongst households in order to understand and evaluate the types of shocks that the sampled households faced in the last 5 to 10 years and how they coped with them. The results showed that one severe drought and period of famine that occurred about 10 years previously still remained at the forefront of many people's minds. Further, their state of shock was still related to that famine and dealing with its consequences 10 years later. The participants further expressed that about 25 percent of the people in their communities were affected by the shocks of poverty and termed themselves as "very poor" or "struggling". The consensus on coping was that they depended on taking credit, relying on remittances and help from family members abroad, or government social programs meant to reduce malnutrition. Other coping strategies included rationed food, extra labour working in the fields, sale of their assets and relying heavily on their Savings Groups. In the face of food scarcity, they resorted to eating lower-quality foods—even eating leaves and wild plants—and using organic manure instead of fertilizers to improve production in their fields. Most importantly, in their definition of resilience, the primary coping strategy was to simply work harder, by either taking on additional income-generating activities or getting up earlier or staying at work later.

Here, in Kenya the devastating effects of drought/famine and the strategies to deal with them have been captured in the statement of a great-grandmother named Ayapan, who was living in the village of Pargati in north-west Kenya. She considered herself rich because 8 years earlier, her family owned 2,000 cattle. However, after a series of devastating droughts, they lost everything. In her words:

*We used to have all the good things of life, we had milk and meat, and we could make money from selling our livestock. But since my husband died, we have lost all our animals through drought and cattle rustling. We have no spare clothes, no shoes, nothing. My family relies on relief food, if it wasn't delivered, we would sleep hungry. I tie a rope around my stomach, and then I drink hot water. That is how I cope with hunger. I am very grateful to all those who support us, I believe that God can do miracles and that things will get better.*<sup>8</sup>

## 8.3 Study Methodology

### 8.3.1 Sampling of Study Sites

The sampling methodology for the study sites was based on the Kenyan Agro-Ecological Zones (AEZs) and respective counties. The AEZs are land resource mapping units, defined in terms of climate, landform and soils, and/or land cover, and having a specific range of potentials and constraints for land use<sup>10</sup>.

First, the counties were classified into AEZs and then counties from six of the eight Agro-ecological Zones in Kenya were randomly selected. The AEZs of interest included Upper Highlands, Upper Midlands, Lowland Highlands, Lowland Midlands, Inland Lowlands and Coastal Lowlands. Out of Kenya's 47

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<sup>8</sup>Catholic Agency For Overseas Development

counties, 15 were randomly selected as study sites.

Since more than 80 percent of Kenyans derive their livelihood from agriculture, classification of counties according to potential agricultural production and land use, with the exception of “urban counties”, was deemed to have a direct bearing on food security in the entire country. Nairobi and Mombasa counties were purposefully added as they consist of 100 percent urban population according to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS). The counties sampled for the survey were Kisii, Nairobi, Mombasa, Kiambu, Bomet, Makueni, Baringo, Kajiado, Nakuru, Laikipia, Elgeyo-Marakwet, Bungoma, Kisumu, Kwale and Kirinyaga. Among these counties, nine participated in Phase one of the study while the remaining six were in Phase 2 of the study.

Five constituencies from each county were sampled except in Laikipia County which has only three constituencies all of which were selected. Furthermore, five wards were picked from the pool of the selected constituencies. In each county, four wards out of the five represented the rural population while one ward represented the urban population in an 80:20 national ratio of rural to urban population. The data was collected from 597 women by the African Women’s Study Centre in 15 counties using both quantitative and qualitative methods with a key purpose to document their experiences in food security.

The methods (techniques) used for capturing women’s experiences were face-to-face in-depth interviews; focus group discussions (FGDs); oral testimonies; and debriefing. All of these methods were organized according to age groups. In the face-to-face in-depth

interviews, the women were grouped into age categories of: 15-24 years, 25-34 years, 35-49 years and 50 and above years. Four respondents were interviewed from the five selected constituencies or wards of the counties making a total of at least 40 respondents. In every age group, one of the respondents had to be a leader and 20 percent of these respondents were to be selected from the area defined as urban for the county.

The FGDs were organized into two groups; one group with participants aged 40 years and below and the other group with participants aged 40 years and above. A total of 3 FGDs were planned for each county, where two FGDs were conducted in the rural areas of the counties and one in an urban area of the county. Using the results from the FGDs, the study focused on capturing the knowledge, perceptions, perspectives and experiences of both younger and older women in the area of food security. To this effect, 4 oral testimonies were also taken in each county. They included two age categories of women aged between 50-65 years and those aged 66 and above years. The intention was to capture the historical perspective on food security among these older women. It was deemed necessary for at least one of these oral testimonies to take place in an urban area of the county.

The method of debriefing took the form of a meeting planned in each of the counties with the representatives of the county management (Governor, County Assembly, other development officers and selected representatives of the participants in all the interviewed areas in the county). These representatives constituted about 20 to 25 people who met at an agreed venue. The

participants were purposively selected based on the cited age groups and wards.

The study tools were organized in modules which catered for the bio-demographic information of the respondents such as age, marital status, educational level and literacy level, livelihood strategies (such as source of income, county monthly income, how income is spent), land access and use in the form of access to land, land ownership, land use, use of output and decision-making; food storage; livestock and ownership' other sources of income; intensity of food insecurity; coping strategies; accessing food and proposals for securing food security. For the purpose of this study, only the modules dealing with background characteristics and coping strategies were of interest.

## **8.4 Results**

### **8.4.1 Background Characteristics**

The findings on the background characteristics of the 597 participants showed that the majority of female respondents (25 percent) were from the age group 25-34 years old, followed by 23 percent from the younger age group of 15-24 years. Those aged 35-44 years formed 22.4 percent followed by 15.4 percent of those aged 45-54 years. The remaining 9 percent and 6 percent came from the age groups of 55-64 years and 65 years and above, respectively. In regard to marital status, 60 percent of the women were married, twenty one percent of the female respondents were single, 11 percent widowed, 4.5 percent divorced and 3.7 were separated.

The findings also showed that 12 percent of the respondents had never gone to school even though 40 percent had attained

secondary school level of education. More than one third (35.6 percent) had attended primary school while 7.2 percent had tertiary and about 5 percent of the women had university level of education. Regarding literacy levels, 61 percent could read and write, 32 percent could read only, 2 percent could write only while about 6 percent could neither read nor write.

According to the 597 women respondents, the size of their households was large. The results showed that the majority of respondents (32 percent) lived in households that constituted 4-5 persons; followed by 27 percent of those that constituted 1-3 members; and finally, 22 percent had 6-7 members. Households with 8-10 members constituted 15 percent while respondents in households with more than 10 members accounted for the remaining four percent.

The livelihood activities for the women, which served as their source of income, were broad. Nevertheless, the data showed that 27 percent derived their income from the sale of agricultural products while 26 percent did so from petty trading/business such as roasting maize. Fourteen percent depended on temporary work while 13 percent managed their livelihood through the sale of animals. These results were supported by the type of incomes that they made. Slightly more than a quarter of the women (28.6 percent) made an average monthly income that ranged between Kenya shillings 2,501 to 5,000. They were followed closely by 26.2 percent for those with a range of Ksh. 5,001 to 10,000 and 23.5 percent who earned below Ksh. 2,500 per month. Only twelve percent of the women earned between Ksh.10,001 to 20,000 per month, and about ten percent of the

respondents earned an income higher than Ksh. 20,001.

### 8.4.2 Coping Strategies for Hunger

Faced with hunger, the respondents devised various strategies to cope with the situation, some of which were extreme. (cf. Figure 1). Some of the strategies used included adults reducing their meal portions so that their children could eat bigger portions; sending children to stay with better-off relatives; borrowing food; doing casual work; selling household items to buy food; or purchasing food on credit. This is consistent with related studies reviewed in the relevant literature. A wider baseline study carried out by AWSC in the same counties established that women engaged in theft or promiscuous behaviour (prostitution) as part of their strategies to mitigate household hunger.<sup>9</sup> This data is reflected on Figure 1.

**Figure1: Coping Strategies for Food Security**

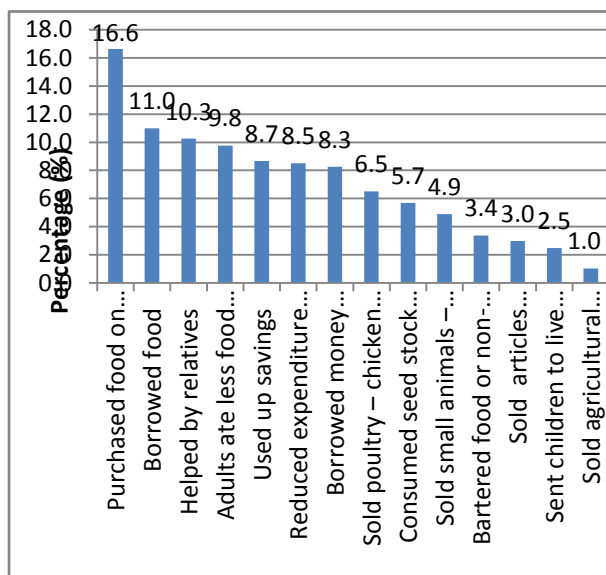


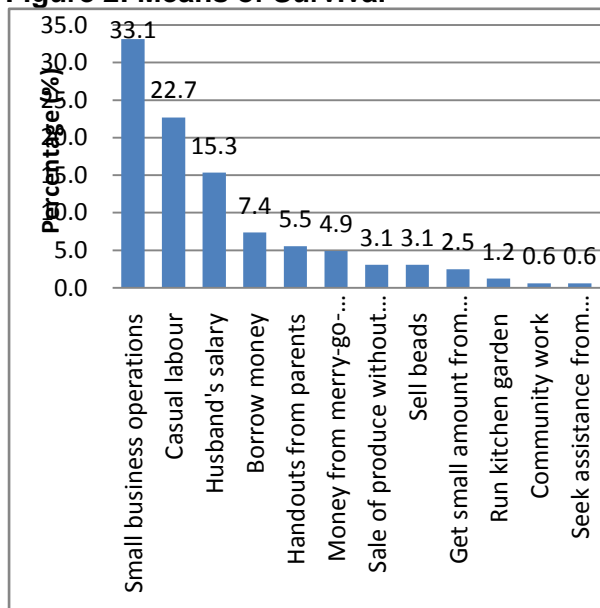
Figure 1 shows that most women (16.6 percent) purchased food on credit as the main coping strategy. This was followed by 11

percent of those who made ends meet by borrowing food; 10.3 percent by soliciting help from relatives; while about ten percent of adults reduced their food portions to ensure that their children ate more. Similarly, nine percent indicated that they used their savings and reduced expenditure on none food items. These strategies extended to borrowing money from relatives, selling small animals such as poultry, consuming seed stock, and bartering, sending children to live with relatives and selling whatever was available. Most important was the fact that these strategies were not mutually exclusive meaning that most could take place at the same time.

Other than the coping strategies which were more retrospective, the respondents were also asked how they survived especially when one did not get money from the sales of farm produce or livestock as reflected in Figure 2. In this regard, the women responded that they would mostly resort to small business operations as means of survival. The results showed that the majority (33.1 percent) of the women depended on small businesses as means of survival followed by casual labour with about 23 percent. Income of the spouse (husband) also featured as an important means of survival with 15.3 percent of the women citing it. Some also mentioned that they would borrow money; depend on hand-outs from their parents; or got money from their social groupings (commonly referred to as merry-go-rounds) amongst other strategies.

<sup>9</sup>AWSC,KNBS, 2014

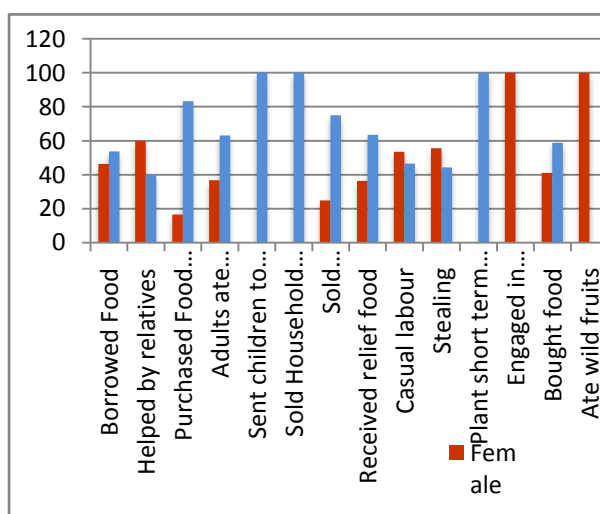
**Figure 2: Means of Survival**



Source: Adapted from AWSC/KNBS Women Experiences Survey, 2014

The next Figure 3 shows results that also corroborated the findings of the baseline survey as cited in Figure 2.

**Figure 3: Strategies adopted to confront Food shortages**



Source: Adapted from AWSC/KNBS Baseline Survey on Food Security, 2014

In this baseline survey, both men and women were separately asked what people in the households did when the households did not have adequate food to eat. Interestingly, it was clear from the results that during times of food

shortages men and women adopted different coping strategies.<sup>9</sup> It was observed that some strategies like prostitution and eating wild fruits were almost exclusively reserved for women while none of the men said they were engaged in such activities for survival. The data showed that women resorted to theft more often than men (52 percent for women versus 42 percent for men, respectively). Whereas almost all of the men, said that they sent their children away to live with relatives, sold household items, and planted short-term crops, none of the women identified these strategies, as reflected in Figure 3.

### 8.4.3 Resilience in Survival as a Coping Strategy

This section presents the qualitative findings that further support the coping strategies and the resilience argument. When asked how they coped, the FGD of women in Bungoma County (Cheptais) reported that they planted traditional foods like bananas, sweet potatoes and cassava and engaged in manual labour in order to get money for food and work for food. Some engaged in small businesses like selling water and firewood to get money for food.

In another FGD in Bungoma County, the women claimed that when the situation worsened, they would be forced to solicit for help from neighbours to cope with food shortages. This was supported by a Mombasa FGD where women used creative means of rationing food in small quantities in order to save some for the next meal. Others cooked one big meal that would last the whole day. Another category reported delaying some meals like breakfast so that at midday, one meal would be served to cater for breakfast



and lunch, while others indicated that they got food donations from the Government.

Women from Seme, Kisumu County highlighted strategies such as borrowing money or foodstuffs such as maize from friends or engaged in barter trade to cope with food insecurity. They reported borrowing 'table money' from their women groups; borrowing maize from relatives and friends; selling poultry, fish and groundnuts to buy other foodstuffs; and exchanging poultry for grain. The younger women would work in neighbouring farms or other well-off households in exchange for foodstuffs and maize.

In an urban FGD in Baringo County, women reported that they had learnt to adjust as families to eating reduced portions of food either by eating less than three times a day or even only one meal a day.

In one of the Nakuru County FGDs, the coping strategies at the household level ranged from seeking financial support from women's groups; deserting their homes in search of food; and engaging in child labour. They reported: *"...coming together as women to form merry-go-rounds where we support each other. Some women are forced to run away from their homes during lunch hour. Some of us wake up very early in the morning and leave the house to avoid telling their children that we have no food at home."*

Evidentially, women go through agony when they have to face their family members with no food to offer them. There are also extremes of child labour where children are forced to work in order to make ends meet. For instance, some of the male children would run errands to fetch water for a minimal fee often shillings,

while the girls would collect remnants of charcoal to either sell or take home to use for preparing whatever food their parents garnered for that day. This made the children (especially the girls) extremely vulnerable, as they were likely to be abused by men. The boys also faced this risk, though to a lesser extent.

In some circumstances the women acknowledged that the situation of hunger could be so dire that they looked forward to social gatherings where they could eat to sustain them for a while. For example, at a FGD in Kajiado County women revealed *"... we eat when we visit social gatherings and that helps us go on for some time. In other situations, we cook porridge and ferment it so that whenever there is no food the porridge is eaten."*

In other places, women collected wild fruits from the forest or turned to selling firewood and charcoal burning or selling water at a minimal fee of fifteen shillings for a ten litre jerry can). Zautra and Murray (2010) concur with this situation that women show a lot of resilience as they interact with their environment and struggle against odds to avert risk factors that could cost them their lives. For all the women, it was sheer torture not knowing where to get food for the members of their households.

At the Mombasa county FGDs, women cited doing odd jobs such as washing clothes for people in order to get money to buy food, while others collect rejected waste grains such as maize and wheat flour in go-downs and markets. Others looked for small contracts (popularly known as 'kubangaiza') to get money to buy food. Some women in the FGD

testified to witnessing people peeling and eating tree barks because they had no food.

These unprecedented strategies of coping with lack of food, some of which come after every year, were also supported by results from oral testimonies where individual women were interviewed in depth on matters relating to food security. Their responses were very similar to what women in the FGDs said about how they coped with food shortages. One 52 year old professional woman from Mombasa had met those challenged by shortage of food and had this to say: *“You will believe me, my friend, that some come and confess that they had taken water only for supper and they swear, even during Ramadhan time...so out of mercy, you go if you have some flour you give them...and they are not pretenders!”*

The following story is touching because it continues to emphasize the resilience of a 75 year old woman, who relied on her faith in God’s miraculous actions as her coping strategy. The oral testimonial story on coping strategies with the elderly woman from Mombasa County proceeded as follows:

**Moderator:** *When you do not have any food at all, what do you do?*

**Di:** (not the real name): *God has been merciful to me. I have never lacked some flour...If things get worse, someone always brings me something to eat - like 1kg of flour and some sukuma wiki [kales].*

**Moderator:** *So there is no single day that you have slept without eating something?*

**Di:** *God has not forgotten me! Even when I don’t have anyone to talk with, I never lack food. Even the neighbours occasionally ask me: ‘Grandmother, have*

*you eaten today?’ I reply: ‘No I have not eaten anything.’ They immediately respond by offering me food. So that is why I say that I have never slept hungry.*

**Moderator:** *Even when you are thrown out of your house due to lack of rent, you still get something to eat?*

**Di:** *During such times, I go and sleep under a mango tree and wait for my Lord to provide.*

**Moderator:** *So you have slept under a mango tree?*

**Di:** *Yes...when I sleep outside I just wait for my Lord –what else can I say or do?*

**Moderator:** *So even when you sleep outside, someone still brings you some food?*

**Di:** *Yes. Someone will come along and say: ‘Grandmother, what is wrong?’ Then I say: ‘I have been thrown out of my house and I don’t have anything’. He/she always gives me something. Yet another person comes along and says: “Grandma today you look like you are in trouble!’ Then the person gives you some money to pay your debt! God indeed has a miraculous way of doing his work.”*

For this 75 year old woman, her faith is the source of the miraculous help in the form of a person to buy her food and pay for her accommodation during the most critical time of need. Even when she was forced to sleep hungry for a number of days, she believed that God miraculously sustained her using well-wishers. This coping strategy was corroborated though other oral testimonials provided particularly by the older respondents in other parts of the country.

In Nairobi County, another conversation with an elderly woman went as follows:

**Interviewer:** *Sasa wakati unaona hakuna chakula ya kupika, siku hiyo unafanya nini?*

*(When you do not have any food at all, what do you do?)*

**Cesi (not real name):** *Riiu niwamenya ciaga no guikara na nii ndii hota guthii kugura, muthee nake oimaga nyumba na mutirima.*

*(We stay like that since I cannot go out to buy any food and my husband uses a walking stick to move around.)*

In Baringo County a 70 year old woman had this to say:

**Moderator:** *When it is severe what do you do? Do you ever go for some days without food?*

**Teri (not real name):** *No, no... I have never gone for days without food. If I sleep hungry, when I wake up, I will get something...however small. The Bible says that we should not worry about what we will eat. So with that knowledge, I know God is with me.*

In Bomet County, the same sentiment was echoed. One respondent narrated that during food shortages, she would worry then pray. Thereafter, she would ensure that at least the children were fed - even if it was with a maize cob or pumpkin. Sometimes when she had money, there was no food available, whereas at other times, she had no money, yet there was plenty of food available at the market. In Kiambu, a 61 year old woman named Anna responded that during food shortages, she looked for opportunities to work in coffee

estates to earn a daily wage. In her view, this was better than begging or stealing.

The general impression was that in desperate situations, women did whatever was necessary to ensure that at least they had something for their children. For the elderly, seeking divine intervention from God was a major strategy adopted. This is resilience in the face of starvation.

## 8.5 Conclusion and Recommendations

Kenya has experienced food shortages caused by weather extremities and conflicts that lead to internally displaced people (IDPs) and general insecurity. Coping with hunger at these times becomes critical and requires the application of various strategies to access food. This paper has examined various mechanisms employed by women to cope with these drastic shocks of food insecurity. According to the findings of this study, it will be critical to ensure that the Bill of Rights as outlined in the Constitution of Kenya (2010) is implemented and enforced. It is unethical for any one to sleep hungry or go for several days without food. Women work hard to look for money or food. However, what happens when the traditional foods do not yield due to climate variation? What coping strategies do women have to use to cope when they have not saved or are not members of any women group? The key question is how women can survive the cycles of food shortage without giving up.

The Government, therefore, needs to implement coping strategies to ensure that citizens (especially the elderly and children) do not sleep hungry. These strategies should be reduced to the more humane and dignified types such as providing women with cash

transfers and credit facilities; providing water for farming; subsidizing farm inputs and extension services to name a few. This would make more sense than waiting for divine intervention or resorting to crime or immoral activities in order to put food on the table.

We recommend that further research be carried out to explore other strong survival instincts among households that can be practically implemented in the case of food

shortages in the future. Specific research should focus on examining resilience as a coping strategy. Although this study does not argue that resilience should be encouraged as a coping strategy, it was clear from the different examples that when faced with food shortages, women undergo unbearable, psychological torture. Hence, all efforts should be put in place to make sure that all Kenyan citizens are free from hunger.

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