

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPACT OF KHAT GROWING ON FOOD
SECURITY IN MAKENGI LOCATION IN EMBU COUNTY, KENYA

KARURAA FRANCIS IRERI

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ABSTRACT

Food production and security is essential and indispensable since food availability ensures that the citizens are healthy and able to actively contribute to social, economic, political and physical development of a country. Food security exists when the whole population has access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life. *Khat* is a plant whose fresh leaves and twigs are chewed to release a juice containing Cathinone and Cathine, the active chemicals that alter the mood of the user. This study has assessed the impact of *khat* on food security in Makengi Location in Embu County. Its main focus was on assessing whether there is a relationship between *khat* growing and food security, local perception of effects of *khat* growing on food security and assessing the relationship between *khat* growing and declining size of land under food crops in the study area. Descriptive survey design was used in this study. The study population comprised of 157 participants selected based on saturated sampling, of which 121 were farmers, 11 traders active in *khat* business and 22 consumers and one Agricultural Officer and two Local Administrators. Data was collected using questionnaires and interview schedules. The quantitative data were analyzed by use of frequency tables, percentages, ratios and means, whereas the qualitative data were transcribed into themes, categories, and sub-categories based on the study objectives. The key findings were there is an increase in *khat* cultivation and declining size of land under food crops. This has consequently undermined food security in the area. In addition the study established that the largest portion of income from *khat* is controlled by men, which affect food security at household level due to income diversion. It also established that the farmers are not engaging the agricultural extension officers to assist them use innovative farming methods that could boost output per acreage. Other than the farmers all other participant in the study were of the view that *khat* has contributed to food insecurity in the area. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that *khat* growing in the study area has negatively impacted on food security. The study recommends that the County Government of Embu should engage more agricultural extension workers to advise the farmers on better crop husbandry and suitable crops to grow with a view of increasing food production and food security. The findings may be useful to policy makers both at the County and National Governments. Food security is a concern of any government, therefore based on the findings of this study the county government of Embu and National government may be in a better position to formulate policies that may boost food security in the area, as well as educate farmers on adverse impacts of *khat* growing. The government may also come up with alternative crops with good returns to replace *khat* growing.