

LAIKIPIA COUNTY

CLIMATE CHANGE, FOOD SECURITY AND MENTAL HEALTH IN LAIKIPIA: FINDINGS AND PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

Fact Sheet | October 2026

Climate change and economic pressures are creating interconnected challenges for food security, nutrition and mental health in Laikipia County. Findings from the Visibilize4ClimateAction project show that 78% of surveyed households experienced a climatic shock, 56% were severely food insecure, and 21% of household heads and caregivers screened positive for depression. Child stunting affected 23% of children under five in the surveyed households.

The findings also highlight opportunities to strengthen resilience by building on Laikipia's diverse food production, existing agroecological practices and county climate policy frameworks. They point to the need for coordinated action on water access, agricultural livelihoods, nutrition and mental health to help communities better prepare for and cope with climate-related shocks.

At a glance

78% of households experienced a climatic shock; drought (52%) and excessive rain (36%) lead
(n = 461 households)

56% of households are severely food insecure, and 30% moderately
(n = 461 households)

23% of children under 5 are stunted; wasting is 8%, medium by WHO thresholds
(n = 413 (stunting), 421 (underweight), 419 (wasting))

34% of women of reproductive age are overweight or obese while 22% are underweight
(n = 222)

21% of household heads and caregivers screened positive for depression; anxiety 18%, PTSD 17%
(n = 736)

54% of households take over 30 minutes to fetch water; only 7% have water on their premises
(n = 461 households)

About Laikipia and the data

The Visibilize4ClimateAction project, funded by Wellcome and led by the African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC), aims to make visible how climate change affects the nutrition and mental health of vulnerable people in East African drylands so that climate policy and practice change at scale.

The findings presented here focus on Laikipia West, a **dry sub-humid county**, with mixed livelihoods and has greater market integration. Casual waged labour is the largest livelihood (39% of household heads and caregivers), followed by crop farming (21%) and livestock herding (14%). The household survey covered **461 households with at least one child under 5** and their mothers, so the figures describe households with young children, not every household in the county. Data was collected between May and June 2025. Community voices come from **focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, oral history and 18 food tree portfolios** with over 370 participants in 6 villages (Raya, Shamanei, Ratia, Oljabet, Limunga and Ngomongo) and a case study of 9 smallholder households as well as **key informant interviews** with county, implementing partners, local CBOs and community leaders.

What we found

A. Climate shocks and the cost of living are hitting incomes, and coping means cutting back

- **78%** of households faced a climatic shock: drought (52%), excessive rain or flooding (36%), extreme cold (35%) and extreme heat (28%). **90%** faced an economic shock, mainly higher food prices (83%).

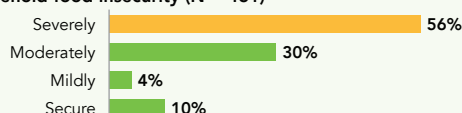
- Drought hit pasture (62%), water (54%) and crops (45%); heavy rain destroyed crops (65%) and property (38%). **82%** reported reduced income.
- Households cut non-essential spending (82%), ate less (79%) and bought food on credit (67%). Only **36%** did nothing to prepare for future shocks, the lowest of the three counties, but most preparation is short-term: savings (25%) and food storage (23%), against income diversification (12%) and water harvesting (7%).
- The project's pathway map links drought and heavy rain to crop loss (65%), lower earnings (82%) and severe food insecurity (56%). It describes what households report together; it is not a formal attribution estimate.

B. Food is more available in the county, but diets and child growth still fall short

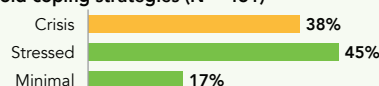
- **56%** of households are severely and **30%** moderately food insecure; 38% use crisis-level coping and 45% stressed coping.
- Laikipia has the highest food production diversity (score 3.8) and **9 months of adequate food a year**; 54% of households grow trees and 46% collect wild foods. Production diversity is linked to land access and wealth, but not significantly to household diets.
- Households eat mostly cereals (99%), vegetables (98%) and oils (95%); eggs (34%), meat and poultry (26%) and fish (3%) are scarcer.
- Child stunting is **23%**, 30% in boys against 14% in girls, and peaks at 34% at 24–35 months. Among women, **34%** are overweight or obese and **22%** underweight, a double burden of malnutrition.

Fig 1. Household food insecurity and coping strategies in Laikipia County

Household food insecurity (N = 461)



Household coping strategies (N = 461)



C. Mental health distress is common, especially among women and households under food stress

- **Depression 21%, anxiety 18% and PTSD 17%** among household heads and caregivers (n = 736). Depression is higher in women (24%) than men (17%), and highest in people aged 35 and over (23%, with anxiety 20%).
- Households that had exhausted food-based coping strategies had much higher odds of **anxiety (5.24x)**, **depression (3.8x)** and **PTSD (4.9x)**, adjusted for age, sex, marital status, household size, wealth, education and livelihood.
- In the Laikipia case study, farmers described anxiety, poor sleep and isolation tied to debt and failed harvests: *"If I have used 50,000 shillings ... and then I don't get 100,000 in return, my mind will not be okay."* (smallholder farmer, Laikipia West)

D. A solid policy base to build on, with water and farm inputs as communities' clear next asks

- Laikipia has a Climate Change Act 2021, Climate Change Policy 2025 and County Climate Change Fund (CCCCF) Mechanism. Its climate and agriculture integration and policy coordination systems are **strong**, while mental health integration is moderate in climate, agriculture and nutrition policy, with an opportunity to further utilize and ward structures to deliver integrated services.
- Communities already irrigate from rivers, harvest rainwater and use tanks. Farmers adopting agroecology cite water scarcity, input costs and market failures as barriers, and ask for water infrastructure, affordable inputs and support for youth.

- Laikipia hosts at least 93 crops, 16 food trees and 137 wild food species, but priorities favour exotic fruit trees over native species that fill lean-season gaps. Focus groups asked for training and quality seedlings.

Key indicators for Laikipia

Indicator	Laikipia (dry sub-humid)
Households with any climatic shock in the past 12 months	78%
Households severely food insecure	56%
Households doing nothing to prepare for future shocks	36%
Households taking over 30 minutes to fetch water	54%
Children under 5: wasting / stunting / underweight (n = 430)	8% / 23% / 16%
Women of reproductive age underweight, BMI under 18.5 (N = 222)	22%
Women reaching minimum dietary diversity	51%
Depression / anxiety / PTSD (n = 736)	21% / 18% / 17%
Food production diversity score; months of adequate food	3.8; 9 months

What this means for Laikipia

1. **Put water first.** Over half of households spend more than 30 minutes fetching water and farmers name water scarcity as the main barrier. Use the County Climate Change Fund for rainwater harvesting, water pans and farm irrigation. *(Action for the County water and agriculture departments.)*
2. **Support households before they reach crisis coping.** With 82% reporting lower income and 38% in crisis-level coping, early food assistance and income support can also protect mental health. *(Action for the County and national government.)*
3. **Tackle the double burden of malnutrition.** Link agriculture to nutrition: promote diverse diets for children aged 6–23 months, support women's nutrition, and put native food trees and vegetables into farm and portfolio plans. *(Action for the County health, nutrition and agriculture departments.)*
4. **Bring mental health into county health and climate plans.** Add mental health screening to health services and use community health volunteers for psychosocial support, focusing on youth, women and people aged 35 and over. *(Action for the County health department.)*
5. **Use Laikipia's coordination strengths.** Build joint climate–agriculture–health planning through existing structures and ward committees, and back inputs, training and market access for farmers adopting agroecology. *(Action for the County government and partners.)*

Partners



Collaborators



For more information

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