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## Rural Turkana Food Environment: Consumers' Perspectives

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### Abstract

The Food Environment (FE) study was conducted in Turkana county, Kenya, one of the arid regions in the country. Loima and Turkana South sub-counties were purposively selected because of security and access. To our knowledge, no FE studies have been previously conducted in these areas. 10 community healthy units (CHUs) were randomly selected. With the help of Community Health Volunteers, 2 households were purposively selected from the 10 CHUs to ensure interviewees were conversant with their FE. Target respondents were people who regularly acquire food in households, mainly men and their wives.

In-depth interviews were used for data collection. The interviews were conducted in the local Turkana language following a predetermined question guide. 18 interviews were conducted in 10 health units. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed for analysis.

From preliminary findings, the main source of food was shops/markets (89%). More than 50% said foods produced from their own farms were safer to consume and of better quality. 72% regularly utilised barter trade to acquire food.

High food pricing was attributed to high transport costs, government taxes and reduced productivity due to unpredictable weather. All households equated food quality to nutrient content of food. Packaged foods were deemed safe and less contaminated; but their preference was divided, with 50% preferring locally prepared/produced foods over packaged foods.

Only 22% of households utilised wild foods (WFs), although they all indicated their neighbours consumed. All participants cited several wild edible fruits and vegetables- the sources and preparation methods. This may suggest there is stigma associated with utilising wild foods; despite them substituting domesticated foods during scarcity.

From the findings, more research should be done on nutrient content of WFs, and the information disseminated to communities to encourage consumption and domestication of these foods for food and nutrition security.

Informal food sources like the wild and barter trade are important in rural populations, hence should be acknowledged in food security policies and programs.

Data analysis is ongoing. More will be presented in the conference.

**Keywords:** Food Quality and Safety, rural Food Environment, Wild Foods