

# Rural Turkana Food Environment: Consumers' Perspectives

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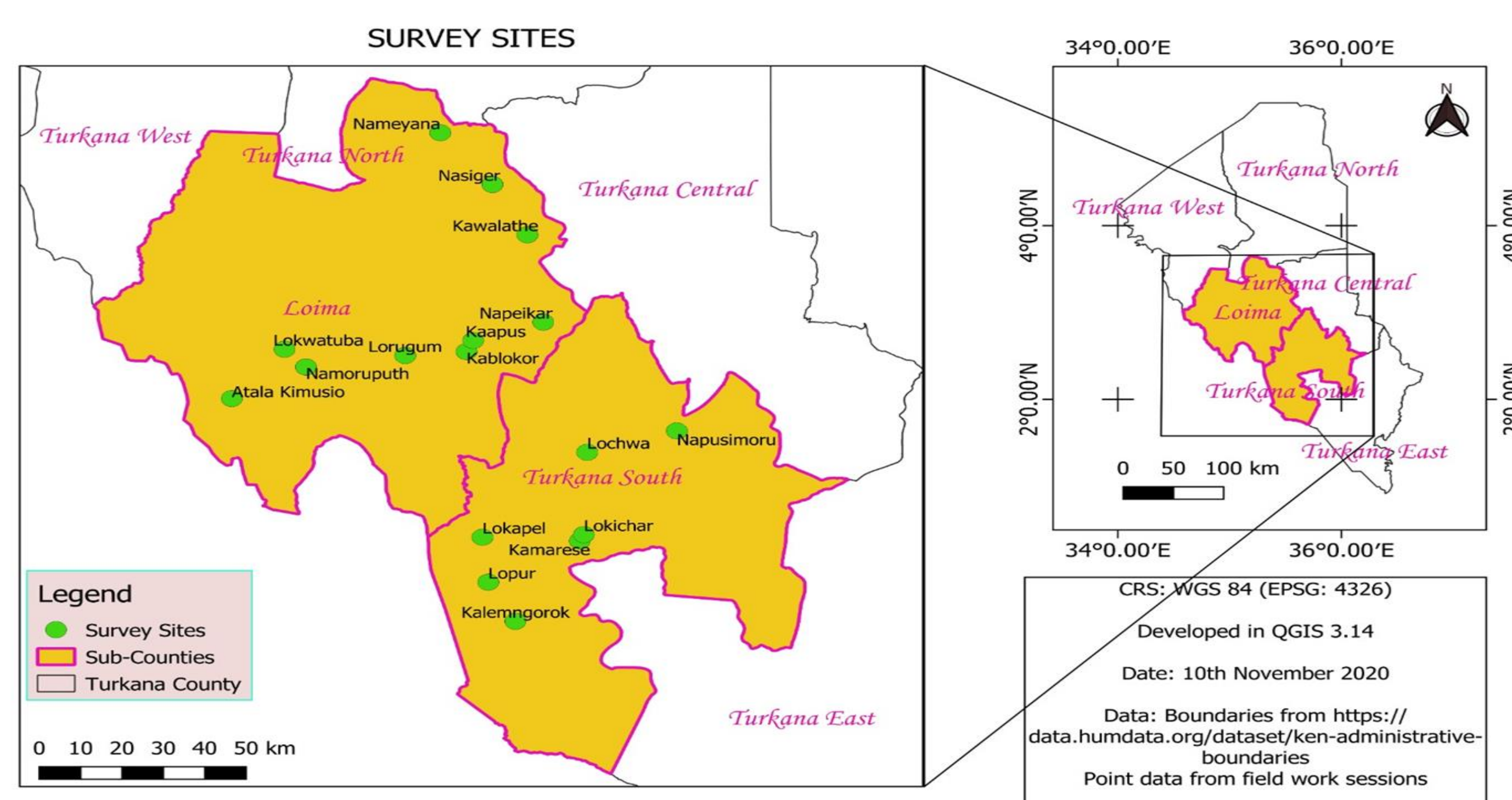
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## Introduction

Within the low - and middle - income countries (LMICs) food environment research is gaining prominence. Most of these studies, however, focus on overweight and obesity with little focus on undernutrition which is still rampant in LMICs (Turner et al., 2018). Absence of such studies make it difficult to make comparisons and draw conclusions across the food systems, hence the need to conduct such studies in areas prone to undernutrition. Similarly, few researchers make use of qualitative research methods to capture the local perceptions and experiences surrounding the community's food environment. Against this backdrop, the current study, conducted in Kenya's drought - prone arid Turkana County aimed at understanding the perceptions of consumer's regarding their own local food environment. The county is characterized by harsh climatic conditions, high poverty levels, remoteness, poor infrastructure, insecurity, and low access to essential services (Republic of Kenya, 2019).

## Methodology

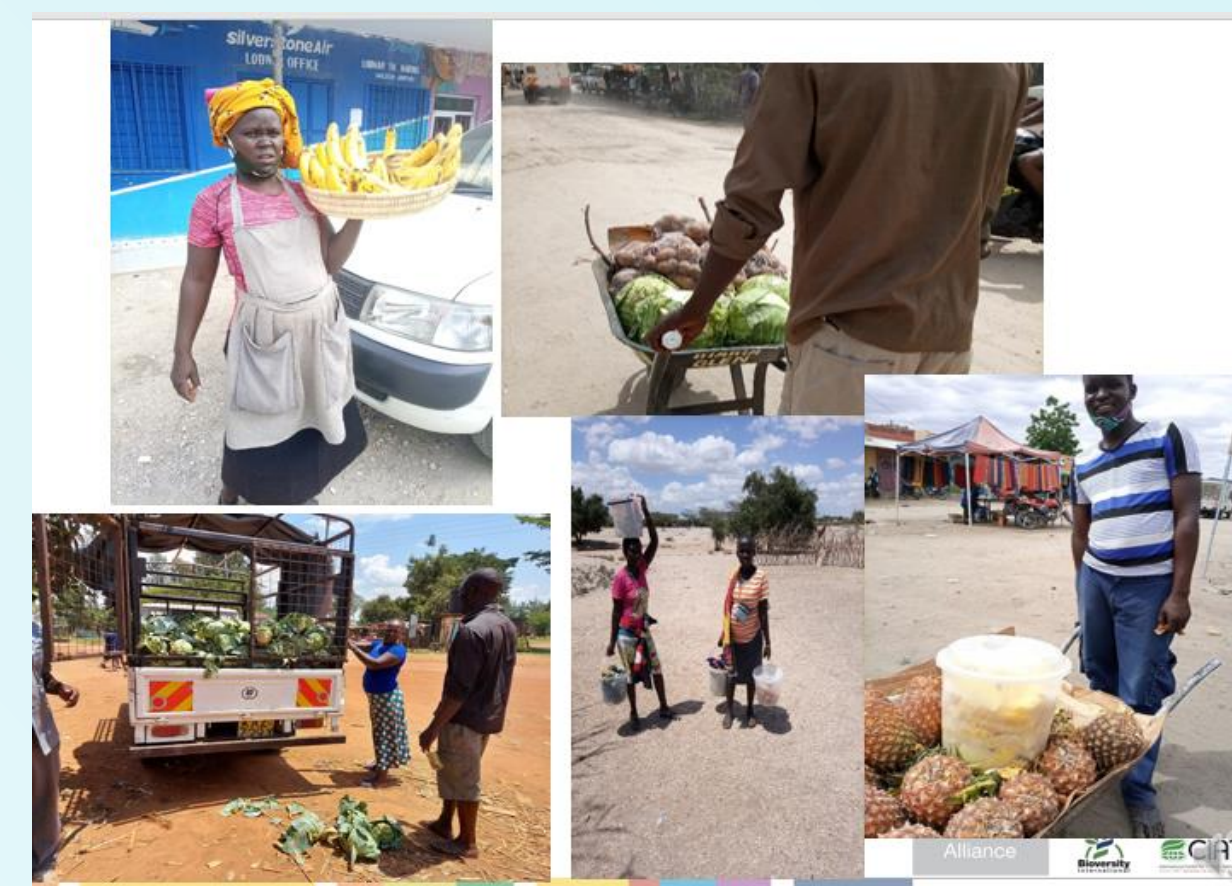
Eighteen in-depth interviews were conducted in the local Turkana language by trained interviewer who had prior experience in qualitative research; and who was a native of the study area. The respondents were purposively selected based on their apparent knowledge of the community's food environment. The eighteen respondents were drawn equally from ten community health units within Loima and Turkana South sub-counties, with the help of community health volunteers. Prior to the interviews, the study obtained clearance from the AMREF Ethics and Scientific Review Committee (ESRC) – P688/2019. Informed consent was sought from all study participants. To facilitate the interviews, the interviewer had a set of questions to guide the discussions which were recorded, transcribed and translated to English for analysis. We used qualitative content analysis as defined by Hsieh and Shannon, 2005. Considering the data was collected following the elements of the food environment, direct content analysis method was first used to interpret the text data in line with the FE elements. In the next step summative approach was applied to identify and quantify words in the text to understand their contextual use (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005).



## Results & Discussions

- Six main food sources were mentioned including non-conventional methods: direct purchase from markets and shops, own farm production, food aid donations, gifts from family and friends, wild food harvesting and
- Barter trade- exchanging with other community members.
- Factory Packaged foods are liked because they are considered to be of good quality, safe, hygienic and free from contamination

- Own production is preferred because it is available within the community, accessible, affordable and of superior quality and safety; but the produce is never sufficient to last up to the next harvest season.



- Mobile food vendors on trucks, wheelbarrows and food are important food sources.
- Truck vendors were preferred because they sold food at relatively lower prices than markets and bring the food closer to the people.

- Street sold ready to eat foods are also common food sources that are liked for their convenience. However, homemade foods are preferred.



While wild food harvesting is common in the study area, they are considered low value foods by the community.

## Conclusion

There are six main ways in which residents of rural Turkana acquire food for household consumption; purchasing and own farm production being the key ones. The choice of which food source to use and the kind of foods consumed is dependent on many factors such as their availability, safety, affordability and convincing.

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

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