



ROUTE
TO FOOD



kula

Emerging
Food
Realities

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Editorial



Whenever we engage in consumption or production patterns which take more than we need, we are engaging in violence."

Vandana Shiva

In 2021 we saw a renewed focus on the global food and farming system. The UN Food Systems Summit took note of the rise in hunger. A quarter of humanity lacks secure access to food, with one in ten people affected by severe food insecurity, and up to 811 million people hungry. In Kenya, the situation is not different. We see many Kenyans continuing to grapple with a high level of food and nutrition insecurity. According to the 2021 State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World, more than 12 million people lack secure access to food and more than 13 million Kenyans are undernourished.

To address the problem of hunger, the Government of Kenya promotes industrial, input-intensive agriculture to increase production. This approach to agricultural development is similar to that of other nations. Governments have incorrectly defined the problem of hunger, as a question of 'not enough food'. However, and as we will see in Paul Goldsmith's article, the problem of hunger is a function of poverty, power and inequality. In addition, industrial agricultural production – using chemical pesticides, fertilisers and hybrid seeds – contributes to the decline in biodiversity, soil quality and indigenous seed systems. Smallholder farmers, who produce more than 70% of the food in Kenya, are marginalised and left vulnerable to climate shocks. The consequences of our current food system are far-reaching. Amongst other things, the situation lends itself to corporate interests dominating the food and farming sector, food quality concerns, high cost of food and the double burden of malnutrition.

In this context, Cha Kula, produced

in collaboration with The Elephant, explores emerging food realities. It documents ongoing shifts in food production, access, distribution, consumption patterns and attitudes in Kenya. Daniel Maingi highlights the failures of the Green Revolution in solving food insecurity and cautions against the concentration of power that comes with seed biotechnology. We are forced to question the legitimacy of not-for-profit organisations such as the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), who have failed in their promise to end hunger. Paul Goldsmith's article illustrates the irony of the Green Revolution. He highlights the problem of food waste as one of the biggest challenges to addressing the crisis. Over one-third of food produced globally – to the value of one trillion dollars – goes to waste, while 25% of water supply grows food that is never eaten. In defining food waste in Kenya and beyond, we see that what is perceived as food is informed by our culture and that the dynamics of food waste and food loss vary in different parts of the world. Nevertheless, it is a reality that is overlooked in debates about how to solve global hunger.

In Kenya, individuals and innovation increasingly influence our food ecosystem. *ShambaJijini* (<https://shambajijini-summit.net/>) is the first online summit in Kenya that brings together a community of more than 50 pioneers in regenerative farming and living. The interview with Ariel Moscardi and Nic Odhiambo, gives us the opportunity to see and appreciate the role of chefs in influencing change by embracing local food systems. Darius Okolla also shares with us how content creators have a role in shaping our food system. He describes how prominent online



personalities and **'foodies'** are influencing food culture and food habits in urban Nairobi.

Despite the growing consciousness in Kenya on improving our food systems, there are still not enough Kenyans agitating against the situation of chronic hunger and linking it to their constitutionally protected, Right to Food.

Dauti Kahura illustrates how citizen-led food protests can shape government policy regarding access to adequate food for all. He begs the question whether the coronavirus pandemic will reignite another food protest in Kenya.

We shall have to wait and see.

Glossary



Agroecology

Agroecology has established itself in the scientific and political debate as a way to ensure food security, maintain healthy ecosystems and support livelihoods in the context of climate change and declining biodiversity. It can be understood as a scientific discipline, a set of farming practices and a social movement.

Genetically modified organisms (GMOs)

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), GMOs, can be defined as organisms (i.e. plants, animals or microorganisms) in which the genetic material (DNA) has been altered in a way that does not occur naturally.

Commercial agriculture

Food produced for sale.



Green Revolution (GR)

A series of agricultural innovations that are intended to increase agricultural productivity by the use of artificial fertilisers, pesticides and GMOs.

Food system

All processes and labor involved in keeping us fed: growing, harvesting, processing, packaging, transporting, marketing, consuming, and disposing of food and food packages. It also includes the inputs needed and outputs generated at each step.

Malnutrition

Malnutrition refers to deficiencies, excesses or imbalances in a person's intake of energy and/or nutrients. The term malnutrition covers 2 broad groups of conditions. One is 'undernutrition'— which includes stunting (low height for age), wasting (low weight for height), underweight (low weight for age) and micronutrient deficiencies or insufficiencies (a lack of important vitamins and minerals). The other is overweight, obesity and diet-related noncommunicable diseases (such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and cancer) (WHO).





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Resilient food systems

Refers to the capacity of people to produce and access nutritious and culturally acceptable food over time and despite environmental, market and economic shocks.

Food waste

According to UN Environment Programme (UNEP), food waste is defined as food that completes the food supply chain up to a final product, of good quality and fit for consumption, but still doesn't get consumed because it is discarded, whether or not after it is left to spoil or expire. Food waste typically (but not exclusively) takes a place at retail and consumption stages in the food supply chain.

Monocultures

Agricultural practice of growing one single crop on a large piece of land.



Permaculture

A system of agricultural and social design principles centered on simulating or directly utilizing the patterns and features observed in natural ecosystems.

Food loss

According to UN Environment Programme (UNEP), food loss happens when food gets spilled, spoiled or otherwise lost. Food loss takes place at production, post-harvest, processing, and distribution stages in the food supply chain.

Slow food

Food that is produced or prepared in a slower, more natural and organic lifestyle that complements nature and in accordance with local culinary traditions, typically using high-quality locally sourced ingredients.

Slow food nation

A country where food is produced or prepared in a slower, more natural and organic lifestyle that complements nature and in accordance with local culinary traditions, typically using high-quality locally sourced ingredients.



How biotechnologies are shaping Kenya's food ecosystem

By Daniel Maingi



Daniel Maingi is an ardent agroecologist, consultant and the Director of Growth Partners Africa. Here, he leads a team partnering with grassroots communities on appropriate sustainable farming technologies that increase their food security, improve their livelihoods and protect the environment.

This article is part of the Food Series - a joint collaboration between the Route to Food Initiative and The Elephant. Full article available via www.theelephant.info/editions/food

The race by multinational corporations (MNCs) to own and register patent protection on seeds and genetic traits, including DNA sequences, has led to a hierarchy of big players who now dominate the global markets through national and international legal instruments.



Power relations and roles in the biotech industry

During the last three years the world has witnessed spectacular mergers and acquisitions amongst the biggest actors in the industry — DowDuPont now Corteva, Bayer-Monsanto now just Bayer, and Syngenta/ ChemChina. Together with BASF, these merged MNCs now control over 70 per cent of the global seed and pesticides market.

Their far-reaching wealth and power has been enabled by states and government actors working with global organisations such as the World Trade Organization and UPOV (Union for the Protection of New Plant Varieties). The consequences have been a concentration of market share and influence, capital accumulation, and unprecedented economies of scale which have led to the marginalisation and the disinheritance of our common seed and genetic resources. The process of agricultural investment in so-called biotech innovation has come to be known as “the Green Revolution” or, increasingly now, the “Gene Revolution”.

Green Revolution (GR) is best understood as the wide-scale adoption and use of disruptive agricultural research and various technologies, including biotech, that are intended to increase agricultural productivity. Green revolutions therefore effectively convert farming and agriculture into an industrial system, because of the extensive adoption and use of new high-yielding seed varieties that often must be accompanied by the intensive use of mechanisation, large volumes of water and expensive irrigation infrastructure, pesticides, and fertilisers. The seed is a critical piece of GR and is the first

portal to creating large-scale bio-economies, and imposing and enforcing patent and breeders' rights protection through national and international laws.

The Green Revolution in Africa

In Africa, the first Green Revolution was a failure and efforts have been underway for a relaunch. The Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) was founded in 2006 to bring high-yield agricultural practices to millions of smallholder farming households. Fascinated by the possibilities of big data and biotechnologies as the centerpiece for a new disruptive revolution in Africa's agriculture, Bill Gates, through the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, together with partners including the Rockefeller Foundation, have collectively pumped more than US\$1 billion in funding to the Nairobi-based AGRA.

To the delight of agribusiness corporations, GR means an expansion in the use of new biotech seeds, fertilisers, pesticides and, of course, irrigation infrastructure and the related mechanisation. To ensure that new seed technologies are adopted and used on a larger scale, Bill Gates has also channeled significant funding to entities such as the African Agricultural Technology Foundation (AATF), African Seed Trade Association, Kenya's seed trader associations, and private companies.

The goal is to influence and catalyse the transformation of agriculture policies and legislations and open up Kenya for commercial agriculture.

Together with the World Bank, the Gates Foundation has funded local stakeholders to lobby and advocate for reforms to remove “obstacles” in policies, laws, and regulations in agriculture, in what they term as “enabling the business of agriculture” (EBA). The annual ranking of countries is closely watched by investors and used by the World Bank, USAID, DfID, and other bilateral donors, to guide their funding. As a result, EBA drives the race to deregulate. Governments in poor countries compete with each other to “reform and change their agricultural laws” so that they can be ranked among the “Doing Business” best performers. Pro-biotech advocacy lobby groups keenly follow Kenya's performance in these rankings.

The future of GR in Kenya's food system

In Africa, it has now been 15 long years since the new GR was launched. AGRA pledged in self-declared milestones that it would double the earnings of 30 million small farmers by 2020 while halving food shortages in 20 African

countries. A Tuft University study found little evidence of significant increases in productivity, income, or food security for people in the 13 main AGRA target countries, but rather, demonstrated that AGRA's Green Revolution model is failing. Between 2013 and 2015, AGRA and CIMMYT released at least 25 water-efficient drought-tolerant maize hybrids (WEMA) for farmers in Kenya. To date, there have not been any magical yield increases as was evident in India when the hybrid wheat and rice varieties were released. Despite the widespread use of these biotech varieties, the increased use of pesticides and fertilisers, and the extensive use of tractors, GR remains a dream in Kenya's food economies.

Why is it so difficult to ignite a green revolution in Africa? AGRA has funded projects and lobbied African governments for the development of policies and market structures that promote the adoption of GR technology packages. Kenya has taken the top spot in enabling the business of agriculture, opening its doors to these biotechnologies. It has won praise and accolades from donors and partners. What else is there to be achieved? It is highly doubtful that affixing Bayer's Bt. insect toxin gene to the drought-tolerant WEMA (now TELA) trait will be the launch of Kenya's green (maize) revolution. It is also highly uncertain that Kenyans will suddenly change their modern dietary habits and start eating biotech cassava, engineered, not for high yields, but to resist viruses.

There is a wave of "new genetic modification techniques" touted to lead to the third generation of GMOs. These include genome editing using various tools such as special enzymes to cut, repair, or even bring new segments into the DNA of living food organisms. Such techniques appear to be science visioning, with biotech supporters saying that one will be able to delete allergy traits from the DNA of peanuts and make lactose-free milk to the joy of the lactose-intolerant.

In 1967, Norman Borlaug's GR varieties undoubtedly averted food shortages albeit temporarily. But they were unable to deter poverty. In fact, GR technologies might have added to it. The high-yielding seeds demand expensive fertilisers and more water. In India, GR led to rural impoverishment, increased debt, social inequality, and the displacement of vast numbers of peasant farmers.

A future with fair food systems

What then must we do to ensure a just and equitable food system in Kenya? What is the way forward for gene and green revolutions? It appears that our experts and technologists have had every room and resource



We have reached the stage where only four corporations dominate the global seeds and genetic traits markets, as they roll out patent-protected biotechnologies to large and smallholder farmers. This is a step to shape food ecosystems in Kenya and elsewhere in the world.

to make Kenya food-secure using all forms of modern biotechnologies, yet there have been no significant results. Perhaps it is time to cut our losses and shirk the industrial-agricultural model that is based on industrial principles.

Climate change is not helping Kenyan farmers. Researchers have been unable to come up with solid biotechnologies that can sustainably overcome stresses from our unique harsh farming climates. Perhaps it is time we looked to nature and farmers' know-how in using another branch of science called agroecology.

Agroecology encourages the building of resilience through crop and varietal biodiversity on the farm. Monocrops are to be avoided to reduce pests and diseases. Farmers and extensionists teach that planting mixed varieties of locally adapted maize on the same farm creates resilience against pests like stem borers and fall armyworms that GMO Bt. maize seeks to control. Farm-level diversity is the key to survival. Seeds with many traits – drought resistance, early ripening tendencies – make for greater ability to adapt to climate change. Relying on just a few varieties is dangerous and making unending royalty payments to the seed "owners" is worse, as it undermines food sovereignty at the farm level.

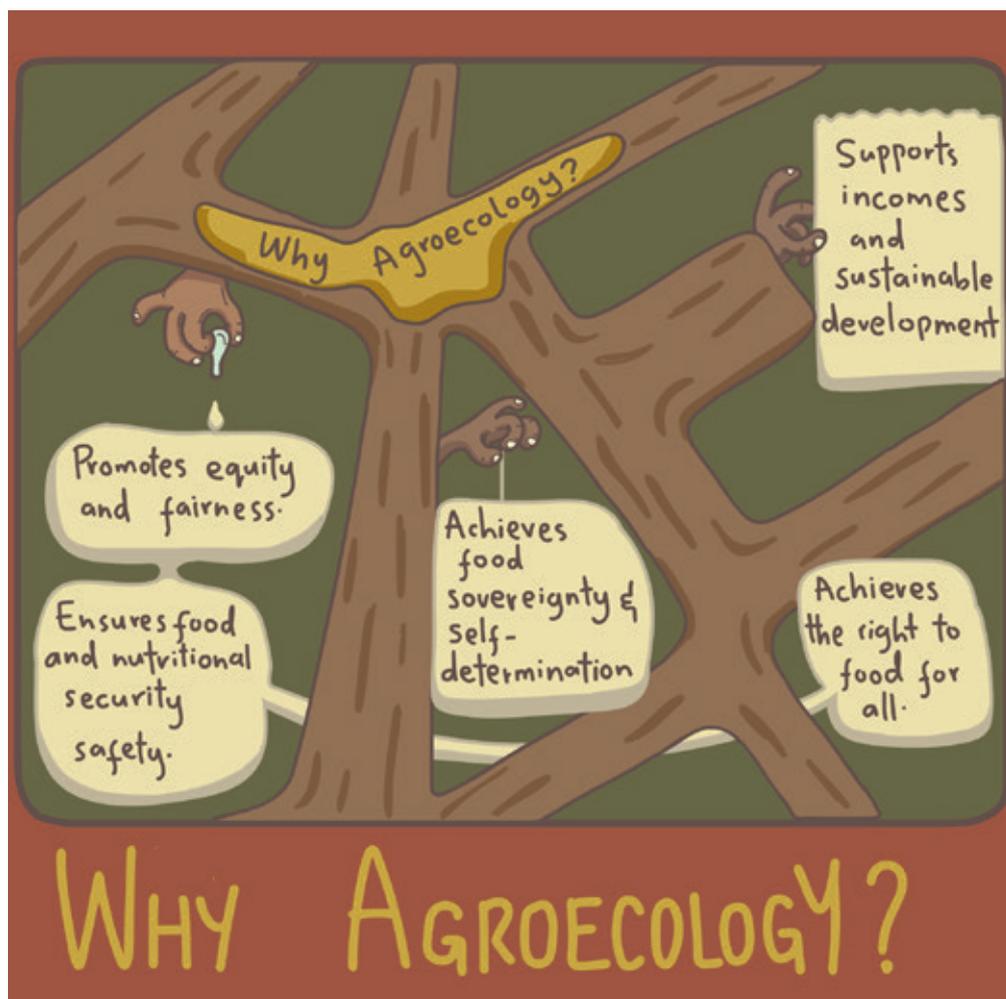
Agroecology encourages the defense of farmers' rights, the rights to nature, and demands the renegotiating of the contract between state and society as stipulated in our 2010 constitution.

Farmers have a right to seed for food and livelihoods. They should be able to freely keep, further develop, sell or even gift their planting material as is culturally accepted. The government should be at the forefront of protecting their rights – not creating skewed power relations between farmers and farm input providers.

There is an urgent need to review, reform, and reconfigure the UN's agri-food agencies to be more responsive to the poor and disadvantaged in the food system. The FAO (Food Agriculture Organization) and the CGIAR (Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research) have received funding from the World Bank and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, swaying research and policy priorities towards more biotechnologies in our food systems.

Dr Agnes Kalibata, President of AGRA and board member of the International Fertilizer Development Center, was appointed as the UN Secretary General's special envoy to the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit. This signals that the summit was yet another forum that advances the interests of MNCs and agribusiness at the expense of farmers.

It is time to put the seed back into the hands of the farmers. If Kenya is to take back control of its food system and reassert its sovereignty over its agriculture, its citizens — free from corporate influences — must be at the forefront of any restructuring. This is the only path to a just and sustainable food bio-economy.♥



What must we do to ensure a just and equitable food system in Kenya? Good agroecology practices lead to a shift towards local food production and short supply chains.

Frequently asked questions (FAQ) on agroecology

What is agroecology?

Agroecology is an approach to farming and food systems. It builds resilience against climate change and market shocks while empowering big and small producers. The concept and principles of agroecology extend beyond food production and off the farm, to the whole food distribution and consumption pathway.

What's the difference between agroecology and organic farming?

In a way, agroecology represents a different kind of farming. It's not necessarily organic or common. Given that much of land use is agricultural, and how environmentally destructive agriculture can be, agroecology seems like the best solution to ensure food production is sustainable and crucial ecosystem services are preserved. Indeed, agroecology goes beyond production, it is more holistic and supports a just and fair food system.

Is organic food agroecological?

It most probably is. Organic food production follows some of the principles of agroecology in production such as recycling; avoiding waste of inputs and use of less harmful inputs in production. Growing is also done using locally available resources that contributes to the building of strong local economies. Choosing organic food is one major step in the right direction.

Won't farmers yields shrink if they stop using chemical and pesticides?

As a farming approach, agroecology works with nature rather than against it. Agroecological farming uses mostly natural and environmentally friendly methods and techniques in farming therefore maintaining/enhancing productivity of the land. However, conventional farming does not necessarily follow the principles of nature. Emphasis is given on maximising production with very little concern to the impact on environment.

How is agroecology different from conventional agriculture?

Initially, agroecology might not be very profitable as the farm requires 2 to 5 years to recover from the chemical inputs of conventional agriculture. The time of recovery depends on how long and how impactful the chemical agricultural regime has been. However, as the soils heal, the yields start to increase, and the farmer sees more benefits considering that costs on external inputs are low.

Productivity vs production: the best assessment would be to look at what the farmer has put in (inputs) compared to what he or she gets out (yield/output). This will give the true picture of which approach is better for the farmer.

In addition, agroecology ensures there is always something growing in the farm through diversification of crops. Producers are also cushioned against risks such as those related to weather, or market shocks. Diversification also enhances food and nutrition, security of farming households and reduces the reliance on purchased foods. This retains household incomes.

What's the difference between agroecology and Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA)?

- Agroecology is more established and has been refined through years of science and practice. CSA is relatively new and applies modern techniques and approaches with fewer practices having been tested.
- Agroecology uses a more interdisciplinary approach going beyond production while CSA doesn't have the same interdisciplinary breadth (focus is solely on production and inputs).
- Agroecology incorporates broader aspects of just and fair food systems, food sovereignty and ecological sustainability. However, CSA is limited in its approach and its main agenda is to produce more with less land (which is sometimes impractical) - i.e. hydroponics, vertical farming etc.

- Agroecology focuses on decentralising food systems while CSA continues to advance the input intensive model promoted by the Green Revolution that includes materials and technologies of all players, big and small while CSA is focused on intensifying food production. that farmers need plus traditional inputs such as fertiliser and pest control products.
- Agroecology is focused on more inclusive farming and food systems with better representation.

Is agroecology suited for all environments?

Agroecology is not a one-size-fits-all set of practices. Rather, it is a set of techniques that have to be adapted to specific needs and ecosystems. Agroecology encourages the use of locally adapted/indigenous foods, varieties and species therefore maintaining these varieties. For instance, farmers use indigenous knowledge and wisdom to find the best solutions in relation to water availability, soil characteristics, landscapes, cultures, food habits, and biodiversity.

How does agroecology combat climate change?

Statistics from The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), indicate that agriculture accounts for the major share of human use of land. Pasture and crops alone took up 37 percent of the earth's land area in 1999. Crop and livestock production have a profound effect on the wider environment. Actually, conventional agriculture is the leading cause of loss of the world's biodiversity.

On the other hand, agroecology advocates for best practices as compared to industrial agriculture, which advocates for the use of synthetic fertilisers and pesticides that pollute the atmosphere, soils, and water sources. Further, through practices like intercropping, mulching and composting, agroecology regenerates the soil.

Soil minerals found a little deeper in the ground could act as a huge carbon sink to help balance out the dangerous levels of carbon dioxide in our atmosphere – a concept known as “Drawdown”.

Can agroecology work in Kenya?

Yes, it can, and it is already working! There are many examples of agroecological systems in Kenya that have proven increased yields and incomes. It is actually not a new approach.

Is agroecology only for subsistence?

No. This is a misperception that many people have, that goes along with the idea that agroecology is ‘ushamba’ or backwardness. Agroecology creates employment and job opportunities along the food value chain and ensures that workers are paid and treated fairly. Agroecological entrepreneurship also holds a lot of potential especially among youth in Kenya.

How is agroecology a social movement?

For a long time, farming has been seen as a man's activity despite the fact that women play such an important role in growing food, selecting and storing seeds, deciding what will, and preparing meals. Agroecology promotes gender fairness and equity.

In addition, the systematic study of nature, means that agroecology is backed by science and innovation happening in our educational institutions. It is important that we need to study nature so that it can be incorporated into our food and farming systems.

How does agroecology promote development?

As the world continues to face immense challenges with climate change, increasing pressure on land and natural resources, food insecurity, and food-related health issues (undernutrition, non-communicable disease such as diabetes etc.), it is critical to rethink current modes of agricultural production in order to restore practices that work in harmony with natural ecosystems.

Agroecology provides low cost solutions that protect the environment and farmers' health. Additionally, it provides jobs, improves livelihoods, and creates resilience against climate shocks.

In contrast, conventional agriculture offers a system where only large, input intensive monocultures can survive. Also, conventional agriculture does not address the issues of unemployment and food insecurity.

Agroecology upholds the right of the people to access healthy and culturally appropriate food. It supports and empowers the farmers who feed their communities.

For more information, email us on info@routetofood.org or check out our website www.routetofood.org

Defining food waste in Kenya and beyond: A comparative perspective

By Paul Goldsmith

My generation grew up in a country where the government used to dump shiploads of grain into the ocean. But not finishing your broccoli, in contrast, invoked mealtime lectures about hungry children in less fortunate countries. Wasting food was a moral problem. It was not the outcome of global inequality and skewed access, that we later learned were responsible for those starving children pictured in UNESCO funding appeals on television.



Paul Goldsmith is an American-born anthropologist who has lived and worked in Kenya for over 40 years.

This article is part of the Food Series - a joint collaboration between the Route to Food Initiative and The Elephant. Full article available via www.theelephant.info/editions/food

Aversion to wasting food is probably wired into our genes. Even so, competing with your friends to kill oranges by rolling them under the wheels of passing vehicles was not exactly a sin when you were surrounded by near-endless expanses of citrus groves, and where neighbours routinely left gift bags of oranges on the doorstep that only added to the surfeit accumulating inside.

This and other examples of excess and profligacy remained largely invisible to the public until research during the 1970s indicated that up to 40 per cent of the food produced worldwide was never consumed. The 1973 University of Arizona garbage study, for example,

concluded that American households were wasting up to a fifth of the meat, produce, and grains they purchased. This cost the average family US\$600 (approximately Ksh 67,000) a year at a time when the annual median family income was US\$12,500 (approximately Ksh 1.2m).

This waste was only part of a much larger problem. The industrialisation of agriculture had improved the efficiencies of production but exacerbated the problem of waste between the farm gate and the family table. We may have come of age feeling guilty about the growing mountains of garbage that had become too big to hide during the 1970s, but this was actually one aspect of a far more insidious syndrome encompassing massive waste and pollution, inhumane treatment of animals, poor conditions affecting the food chain work force, and negative impacts on consumer nutrition.

These and other related issues were brought home by Eric Schlosser in his seminal 2001 book, *Fast Food Nation*. We learnt that commoditisation and convenience had created a monster. This is why many of my peers and I became strict vegetarians. We avoided processed foods and sought out organic produce wherever it was available. Food was one of the sacraments of the counterculture movement, and we believed our elevated tastes and preferences made us holy. Subsisting on bean sprouts, carrot juice, and brown rice was our ticket to heaven.

An education in the anthropology of food

I eventually came to recognise that this culinary elitism was a luxury, an Aquarian age equivalent of a Roman bacchanal. The realisation contributed to my decision to travel abroad and experience life in the more organic environs of the developing world.

After nine months in Central America, I ended up in Kenya, which was still a slow food nation at the time. I arrived



Food waste is part of a much larger problem. The industrialisation of agriculture has created structural inequalities in the food system which lead to the problem of waste between the farm gate and the family table.



Halving food losses in Africa would significantly impact food availability, affordability, and malnutrition among the poor.



when the hunger crisis precipitated by the Great Sahel Famine was peaking, and my first venture beyond the relatively well-fed highlands saw me spend several weeks in Turkana. My real education in the anthropology of food began in November of 1974.

We left Kitale on the back of a lorry

carrying sacks of famine relief flour, arriving in Lodwar under a full moon at 2.30 a.m. Our driver insisted I join him for libations in the local bar, where we sat next to a window besieged by a posse of naked boys. The driver teased them by pretending to press a coin into the skinny hands protruding through the windows. He allayed my

apparent discomfort with a beaming smile, “*Sijali, wako na njaa, lakini tumewabebea chakula.*” Yes, these kids are hungry, but we are the ones bringing them food, he said.

We explored downtown Lodwar, which consisted of two streets lined with wooden storefronts. A door opened up briefly and a Somali man motioned us inside, where he served us black tea and dry bread and refused payment. My friend the lorry driver said he was going on to Kalokol, and invited us to join him. A crowd of stick people collected around us as we waited for the lorry to depart, withered arms extended. I watched an old man squatting to the side keel over.

Impelled by a mix of compassion and discomfort, we started cutting up our travel stash — a basket of fruit — distributing strips of papaya and mango as the engine roared into life. Then, as the lorry lurched into gear, the recipients of our largesse pelted us with the fruit.

It was three weeks before the next lorry left for down country. We traveled during the day this time. The lorry briefly stopped at a laaga, where several emaciated Karamoja men petitioned us for food. The upcountry people on the lorry tossed them some biscuit boxes, and then enjoyed a hearty laugh when the pastoralists found they were empty. “We work for our food,” they told me.

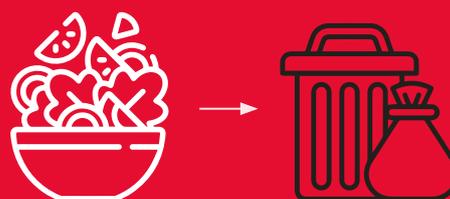
Making sense of my time in Turkana coalesced around two observations. The first was that how we define food is a culturally-bound concept. I will forever associate Kalokol with the pungent aroma of roasted doum palm nuts, which the Turkana spent their days converting into a course flour - on the shores of one of the world’s least exploited inland lakes.

As for the hungry Turkana who wasted our fruit, they had probably never seen a papaya or mango, much less tasted one. Several years later the same point was reinforced by my mother-in-law in Lamu, who demurred when I argued for reducing our young children’s starch-heavy diet: “*hii mboga yako si chakula,*” she objected.

The second observation notes that the universal practice of sharing food in Africa is subject to issues of identity and social relations. In any case, food losses, and not food waste, is the greater problem in Kenya. Food losses refer to any decrease in food mass across the edible food supply chain, which claims up to 30 per cent of the food produced across the world. Food rarely goes to waste in Kenya, but post-harvest grain losses range between 10 and 20 per cent of the harvest - an average of 13 per cent of Kenya’s maize harvest - and such figures would be much higher if

they factored for food in the field and on the hoof that is lost to drought, disease, and other risk factors.

Where the losses increase closer to the consumer’s plate in the developed world, in Africa most of the losses occur close to the farm-end of the chain. Halving these losses in Africa alone would significantly impact food availability, affordability, and malnutrition among the poor.♥



Research during the 1970s indicated that up to

40%

of the food produced worldwide was not consumed. This kickstarted the global debate on how to reduce food waste, whilst highlighting that hunger is not a problem of production.

CHA KULA #5

EMERGING FOOD REALITIES

SUPPORTING AFRICA TO REALISE FOOD SECURITY

- A1 - How biotech companies are shaping Kenya's food ecosystem
- A2 - Defining food waste in Kenya and beyond a comparative perspective
- A3 - Good food. Good farming. The role of a chef in influencing change
- A4 - Influencer culture and food habits in urban Nairobi.
- A5 - Will an Unga revolution follow in the wake of the coronavirus?



MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS

A2

A1

INCREASED PRODUCTION DOES NOT TRANSLATE TO INCREASED ACCESS

WASTE

SO MUCH FOOD IS LOST ALONG THE WAY

INEFFICIENT FOOD SUPPLY CHAINS LEAD LOSS OF FOOD BEFORE IT CAN GET TO THE CONSUMER.

PEV

2008



“ I THINK WE SHOULD STOP AFRICA IS BETTER WHERE WE ARE #Agroecology ”



“ THE SHORTER THE DISTANCE FROM FARM TO FORK, THE HIGHER THE QUALITY OF NOURISHMENT. ”

COOKERY SHOWS AND FOOD INFLUENCERS REMIND US OF WHAT USED TO BE THE SOUL OF THE HOME...



A5



FOOD REVOLUTIONS CAN SHAPE POLICY ON THE RIGHT TO FOOD





Good food. Good farming: The role of a chef in influencing change.

By Kainyu Njeri, inspired by interviews
with Ariel Moscardi and Nic Odhiambo

Kainyu Njeri is an explorer of regenerative culture and food systems design as well as a member of the Route to Food Alliance.



The world's approach to producing food and addressing the global hunger crisis is to produce more and, above all, cheaper food. This, in turn, has had far-reaching individual and societal consequences. "Cheap" food is produced with very high external costs: environmental degradation, malnutrition due to calories without sufficient nutrients, and the destruction of social structures in rural regions. The evolution of agriculture was thought to serve, rather than destroy, human life and the critical biodiversity upon which our survival depends.

During the last 200 years, industrial production methods became the mainstay of agriculture. Machines such as tractors began to undertake tasks that were previously performed by muscle power, or not performed at all. Fields and animals became vastly more productive thanks to artificial fertilizers, industrial insecticides, and an entire arsenal of hormones and medications."

Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*

Over time, we have split our food system into the disjointed parts of production, distribution, consumption and waste management. When we locate these parts within the context of food service and hospitality, what most consumers experience is the end point of a long value chain, with little knowledge of the processes leading up to it. This makes the role of chefs, culinary artists and the likes, increasingly important in efforts to support local, sustainable, farming systems and food sovereignty.

In the last two decades, we have witnessed our food systems deteriorate due to climate change, commercial agriculture, and the homogenising of consumer needs and habits. According to Jumia's 2020 Food Index, Nairobi is the leading city across Africa in online food delivery. The majority of these purchases are fast food. To sustain a fast food culture as active as Nairobi's, requires mass production at every level of the food supply chain. How then, do we establish regenerative, resilient and thriving food systems? Whose eye do we allow ourselves to see through for the fine strokes of a broad perspective?

I have considered the place of restaurant owners, cooks, chefs, culinarians and even the modest *kibanda* in the food web – the disposition their vantage point affords them and the responsibility they hold as a result. For the chef that is aware of this, and seeks to contribute consciously, what opportunities and challenges define their reality? It is quite a responsibility – the ability to influence another's experience of food. Their basic sustenance.

Cultiva is a farm and restaurant in Nairobi that follows a permaculture philosophy. Permaculture guides us how to grow, build houses, create communities and minimise environmental impact at the same time. Its principles are being constantly developed and refined by people throughout the world in very different climates and cultural circumstances. I had stumbled upon Cultiva's Instagram page and was entranced by all the culinary creations. Each plate was a work of art. However, it was the philosophy underpinning these pieces of art that struck me: farm to fork!

Running parallel to commercial agriculture and agro-industry, are movements seeking to establish resilient food systems. Most, if not all, have at their centre one simple idea: The shorter the distance from farm to fork, the higher the quality of nourishment.

Ariel Moscardi, the chef and one of two entrepreneurs behind Cultiva's existence, is a man well aware of this truth. I ask him what he credits his successes to and "restlessness" is his response. As a chef he knows the colours, flavours, aromas and textures of a meal before it exists. To maintain integrity between vision and presentation he had to take several steps back and consider the factors that contribute to the profile he envisions for his meals - this is where culinary scientist meets curious artist. This line of questioning and observation has led him, over and over, back to the land and soil that gives life to our food. The Cultiva team pride themselves in presenting a menu whose ingredients are either grown on their urban farm next to the restaurant or sourced locally. The ingredients that are used are only what is in season as this ensures that produce is not traveling great distances to be part of the menu. It is central to Cultiva's culture that the food served there is, in this regard, an expression of the context within which it exists.

Ariel is quick to remind me that our experience with food begins long before we taste it. A colourful plate not only means a wider variety of nutrients, it also sets one up to connect with and enjoy their meal. As we take a walk through the garden, I begin to see how this works. It is a garden bustling with colour. There is a wide variety of kales, lettuces, carrots, tomatoes and herbs, to mention a few. Most of these varieties are heirloom and are grown organically. The organic waste from the restaurant makes its way back into the garden as compost. A closed food system. Care is taken to ensure the most flavourful version of any of these plants is what makes it to the plate.



The reality of sourcing food locally and creating a 360-degree food experience is somewhat new in Kenya and I was curious to hear his take on the opportunities and challenges this presents Kenyan producers and consumers. His response? *Minga*. A Quechua word meaning 'collective work'. An expression of this idea he would like to see more of is organic markets. They create the environment

for trade and conversation between farmer and consumer on process, quality and pricing. They also are a place where farmers and consumers can meet to experiment with value addition. As the number of organic farmers increases, it becomes necessary to map and catalogue their work and produce. Making this information easily accessible to the consumer begins to close

the gap between the two ends of the food system. A sentiment chef Nic Odhiambo later reiterates as he emphasises the necessity of such access in establishing a thriving food culture, and one that I seem to be coming across more often, lately, amongst Kenyan foodies.

During conversations with customers, any question about the menu is



an opportunity to educate the diner on some aspect of the closed loop of a sustainable food system they are contributing to. Consumer education is another place where great opportunity lies as we take steps towards establishing resilient food systems.

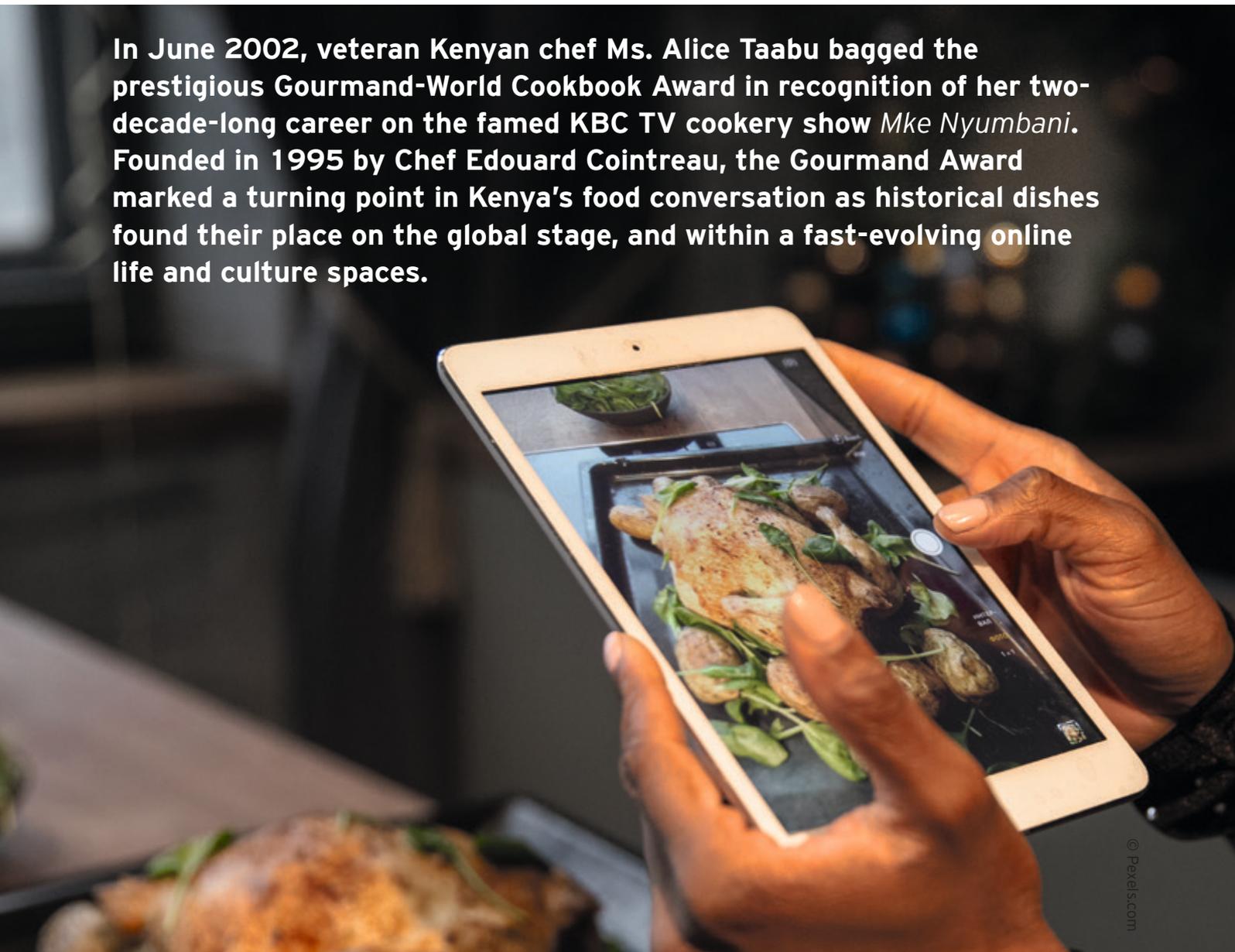
COVID-19 has highlighted the extent to which our food systems are broken. The State of Food and Nutrition Security 2021 Report showed that a quarter of humanity lacks secure access to food, with one in ten people affected by severe food insecurity, and up to 811 million people hungry. Another quarter of the world's population suffers from various forms of malnutrition, including obesity, with huge negative effects on health.

The crisis is real. It is incumbent upon those who are producing food to those who are preparing and serving food, to rise to the challenge of using local supplies, supporting local businesses, and sourcing ingredients that are sustainably produced whilst using spaces of influence to share knowledge and information. Chefs, and their restaurants, have a unique opportunity to contribute to solving the wider problem of broken food systems and the food insecurity dilemma. ❤️

Influencer culture and food habits in urban Nairobi

By Darius Okolla

In June 2002, veteran Kenyan chef Ms. Alice Taabu bagged the prestigious Gourmand-World Cookbook Award in recognition of her two-decade-long career on the famed KBC TV cookery show *Mke Nyumbani*. Founded in 1995 by Chef Edouard Cointreau, the Gourmand Award marked a turning point in Kenya's food conversation as historical dishes found their place on the global stage, and within a fast-evolving online life and culture spaces.



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It is out of Alice Taabu's pioneering work that now there's a growing Kenyan culture of cooking shows, online recipes, and marketing of new social trends in food consumption. With their origins in broadcast television, food show formats have been adapted on content channels such as Netflix, Pay-Tv, Amazon Prime, brand websites and digital platforms like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram.

Yet, even as the ever versatile chef Alice stuck to the time-tested free-to-air TV model, younger, more boisterous incomers like Arthur Mwai were pushing beverage and culinary options away from the mainstream into newer spaces, including setting up the famed *Psys*, first on Langata Road and later in Westlands.

Since the mid-2000s the online food culture has evolved and birthed offshoots of *Mke Nyumbani* with varying shelf lives and scope. Buoyed by both the growing ease of content creation, falling cost of internet connectivity, and demand for local content and local delicacies, recipes increasingly find their way online and into the watching experience of Kenyans within ever-expanding digital ecosystems.

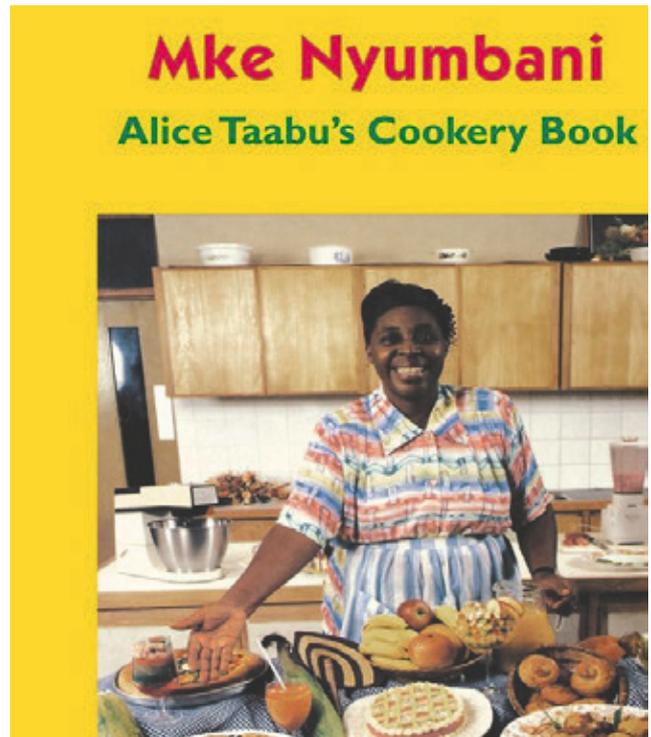
The 2010s saw the explosion of the online world as local content creators consolidated their influence, benchmarked against each other, and set-up entire platforms for curating similar content. It's no wonder then that Yummy was launched in 2012, *Eat Like a King* in 2013, *Kaluhi's Kitchen* in 2014, *Get in The Kitchen* on K24 in 2015, and *Shamba Chef* in 2017.

Kenya's Anita Kerai, secured a 7-part food series on Amazon Prime, and published her 170-page *Flavours from Kenya* cookbook. Then there's *The Great Kenyan Bake Off* which is based on the British version *The Great British Bake Off*, Ali Mandhry's *Tamu Tamu*, and Martin Munyua of *Dads Can Cook*.

Food shopping apps

A February 2021 poll showed that nearly 4 in 5 shoppers are spending more on online shopping with data top-ups (92 per cent), clothing (67 per cent) and electronics (56 per cent) topping the list of products bought. Meanwhile services sought online include cooking recipes and techniques, dancing classes, learning languages, and mastering DIY projects. That number has inched even higher as COVID-19 restrictions closed down brick and mortar outlets across the country.

The music/movies segment tops the list of online search



Why and how does the psychology of food influencer marketing work? What makes *Mke Nyumbani*, or *Dads Can Cook*, *Shoba's Cookouts* or *Indomie Twitter* such a social phenomenon?"

content, followed by electronics with fashion in third position. But the food segment is growing rapidly; online food stockists and delivery firms including E-Mart, Glovo, Chandarana FoodPlus, UberEats, Yum Deliveries, as well as Green Spoon and Jumia Food have recorded spikes in their online demand.

Twiga, Kalimoni Greens, Kibanda Online, Gobeba, are an example of platforms that have embraced digitalisation and online payment systems to cater to the palate of a tech-savvy society. As online food shopping gains traction, the

numbers are bound to surge forward as consumers develop trust and make buying decisions based on the visual displays, coupled with a seamless product and user interaction.

Psychology of food influencer marketing

The question still remains though: why and how does the psychology of food influencer marketing work? What makes *Mke Nyumbani*, or *Dads Can Cook*, *Shoba's Cookouts* or *Indomie* Twitter such a social phenomenon? The short answer is that influencer marketing plays directly into the human desire to belong. It amplifies our proclivity towards things that are familiar.

Behavioural psychologists and neuromarketing experts call this the mere-exposure effect. All else being equal, the more we're exposed to something that's relatable, the more we like it. And fascinatingly, this preference for the familiar often appears to operate outside of our consciousness.

It appeals to our need for social conformity, and our mental processing functions. Basically, our brain is wired to respond to stimulation from influencer marketers whom we already trust at a virtual interaction level. We find their persuasion more authentic, more fun, and more attractive than other types of persuasions. The link is optimised when the awareness and affinity of the consumer gels with the creativity of the influencer.

Hence, for example Shoba Gatimu's earthy humor, the ingenuity of the *Indomie* Twitter crew, Hannah Thee Baker's digital influencing makes food products look good on set, given they are agile chefs who're good at their craft.

The psychological terrain of the food

influencer market is what happens when social users follow friends and famous personalities, rather than corporate brands. These consumers turn to social platforms to connect and mimic popular lifestyles. Consumers rely on relatable figures to help them filter through the hundreds of choices online. In turn, they consume lots of visual content which food influencers are primed to optimise.

Research shows that well thought-out visual influencer marketing in the food industry incentivises an engagement rate of 7 per cent and can imply conversion rates of up to Ksh7 for every shilling spent. Ultimately, the partnership between brands and influencers is built on the social ingredient that their personas brings, while building up significant returns on investment.

The evolution of the kitchen influence

An even bigger influence in group-wide food tastes and preferences among Kenyans stems from social sharing. Influence at that level is therefore built into our deep networks of trust, approval, love, companionship and even identity. The most enduring influence on our food tastes therefore comes from the social affections that we've built within family and friendships.

In the modern family kitchen, efficiency has gradually eroded camaraderie, as technology reorients and at times replaces our cooking traditions. Meanwhile convenience has become king, as cookware, countertops, drawers, ovens and cabinetry signal the gradual evolution of both the home, the consumer society, and technology.

Your typical modern Kenyan kitchen now bears little resemblance to the home kitchens of old. Before the



Recipes are getting increasingly local. Nduma, ngwaci, bean bread, osuga, banana bread, githeri, chicken and ugali, fish, irio, kimanga, matoke, mbaazi, njahi, porridge - to name just those - are sneaking their way back onto our dinner plates, Tiktok, YouTube, and Gram.



dawn of modernity, human life revolved around the kitchen and the farm, and the roles that defined providing food were often assigned to the women in the community. The traditional designation of the kitchen as the centre of family life was challenged by the industrial revolution that drove the locus of 'civilisation' away from the kitchen – and by extension the home – into the milling factories miles away.

And as Ally Matsoso opines, “As men began to accumulate excess wealth and power, they gained freedoms women lacked. Survival and family stability were no longer their sole motivators. Women, as nourishers of the family, decreased in influence as the family's importance decreased, crowded out by commerce. Local bakers could now supply our bread. The spiritual center, the home, had to compete with a material culture, capable of satisfying needs the home once met, and of creating new needs as well.”

What we are seeing at the tail end of capitalism, is a major shift in food cultures and the nuances built around them. Male chefs grace our TV shows and Instagram food influencers represent a wide range of ages, gender, sexes, class, and persuasion.

There is increased diversity in meal plans, and orthorexia is now a prevalent habit that is defined as a genuine and critical concern about what someone eats. This could range from giving up sugars or oils or meat as a matter of preference. It can also be seen in veganism, vegetarianism or pescatarianism, diets that are adopted either because of health concerns, ecological issues, religious beliefs, or a myriad other social, cultural, moral or personal desires.

Recipes are getting increasingly local as health concerns, and choice of nutrition over taste, gives preference to local

delicacies once considered not cool enough for our social media streets. Nduma, ngwaci, boiled/roasted maize, bean bread, osuga, banana bread, githeri, chicken and ugali, fish, groundnuts, vegetable dishes, irio, kimanga, cassava and bean mash, matoke, mbaazi, njahi, porridge — to name just those — are sneaking their way back onto our dinner plates, Tiktok, YouTube, and Gram.

In this sense, the growth of cookery shows and food influencers is not so much the ultimate co-option of the home kitchen by modernity, as it is a recreation of what was, until the dawn of modernity, the soul of the home.

At the end of the day, the ultimate food influence in our lives may not be the familiar and likable chefs on TV, but our mothers and fathers, their recipes, the dinner table, and the food rituals in our family kitchen.♥

Will an unga revolution follow in the wake of the coronavirus?

By Dauti Kahura



Dauti Kahura is a researcher and senior writer at The Elephant.

This article is part of the Food Series - a joint collaboration between the Route to Food Initiative and The Elephant. Full article available via www.theelephant.info/editions/food

Writing for the Route to Food blog on 8 January 2019, University of Nairobi don, Celestine Nyamu Musembi and Patta Scott-Villiers, a research fellow at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), Sussex University, said: “Though Kenya’s (im)moral economy was forged at a time of colonial rule, the pattern of the weak response to undernourishment has persisted. Kenyans on low income do not feel that they have a right to not feel hungry, despite the words of the constitution.”

And what do the words of the 2010 Constitution state? They guarantee food for all – that no Kenyan should go without food. That food is a basic need and an undeniable human right. Specifically, Article 43 (1) (c) states that,

“Every person has the right to be free from hunger, and to have adequate food of acceptable quality.” This state of affairs, of poor and underprivileged Kenyans not knowing that they have a right to not feel hungry, has been particularly evident during the coronavirus pandemic.

The onset of COVID-19 in Kenya in March 2020 exacerbated an already bad situation insofar as the food crisis was concerned. By February, the government had been sending warning signals indicating that the maize reserve was depleting and could not last for the next six months.



The COVID-19 containment measures caused a majority of Kenyans - those who live in the ghettos and the crowded suburbs of Kenya's towns and cities - to lose their daily (casual) jobs, their *kadogo* economy businesses and other self-employment hustles. More Kenyans started going hungry.

We want food

In 2020, sections of Nairobi's underclass and those living in low-income areas attempted to organise food protests in the hope of prompting the government to help them with food rations. On 11 May 2020, Eastleigh residents woke up to demonstrations, with people waving placards reading "*we want food*". The demonstrators were peaceful, and their message was targeted at the national government which has the mandate to provide relief food. However, the protestors were disbanded by the police.

In their blog, Musembi and Scott-Villiers further stated that "Moral economies emerge and are renewed each time there is a subsistence crisis. These episodes leave an imprint in people's hopes and expectations that can last for decades."

Unga Revolution

Have Kenyans been docile when it comes to agitating for food rights? Not always. The 2011 food protests dubbed the *Unga Revolution* proved that when pushed to the limit, poor and low-income Kenyans can mobilise for their right to affordable food.

Unga is the Kiswahili word for the white maize flour, which is used to make *ugali*. Up until President Mwai Kibaki's reign, this was the most affordable staple for low-income households. When he came to power in 2003, a two-kilogram packet of *unga* cost Ksh30. By 2011, during Kibaki's second term - which was a coalition government with Prime Minister Raila Odinga - the price of *unga* had shot up to Ksh120.

Granted, the country was going through a devastating drought and there was a global rise in food and oil prices, which led to Kenya experiencing a 14.5 per cent inflation. Yet, it is in times of such crises that the government should act to cushion the poor and underprivileged by providing them with the necessary basic foodstuffs.

But truth be told, the *Unga Revolution* was not a spontaneous reaction to soaring food prices, or to Kibaki's insensitive government policies and attitude towards the poor. It was the expression of the accumulated anger and



Kenyans on low income do not feel that they have a right to not feel hungry, despite the words of the constitution.

frustration of a people talking to a "deaf" government over a period of time. By the end of Kibaki's first term the price of *unga* had nearly tripled; a two-kilogram packet of maize flour was now costing Ksh80.

The bungled 2007 presidential election led to internecine warfare in Kenya's breadbasket, mainly in the central and north rift regions where most of the country's maize is grown. The post-election violence displaced about 600,000 people, most of them farmers, and many lost their lives. Predictably, the country experienced a severe maize shortage in the aftermath of the elections – 35 million bags of maize had been destroyed in the violence. Hunger loomed.

Protests in 2008 pressurised the government to re-evaluate its "maize policies" by, among other measures, asking the National Cereals and Produce Board (NCPB) to import three million bags of maize to plug the gap.

The high maize prices in 2008, the shortages and the hoarding, were threatening to get out of hand. A woman alighting from a matatu at the infamous Kibera slum was spotted carrying supermarket shopping that included packets of *unga*. Rowdy youths accosted her and relieved her of the packets of maize meal. In Mathare and Mlango Kubwa slums, the ghetto dwellers would not wait to die of hunger; they invaded homesteads that reared pigs, grabbed the animals and slaughtered them.

So, by 2011, there was already a groundswell of angry and hungry citizens because prices of foodstuffs had not stabilised or come down. The coalition government did not seem to have any strategic plan to ensure that poor Kenyans did not go hungry because of unaffordable maize meal prices.

The *Unga Revolution* started as a movement among the urban poor in the slums of Nairobi. The protests reached a

crescendo on 7 July 2011, *Saba Saba Day*, a date associated with the pro-democracy second liberation movement of the 1990s.

Spearheaded by *Bunge la Mwananchi* (the people's parliament), the *Unga Revolution* gained momentum as a grassroots movement. It organised the people from the slums of Huruma, Kariobangi, Kibera, Mathare and Mlango Kubwa among others, to come together and press for fairer maize meal prices.

"The first meeting of the *Unga Revolution* took place in *Kwa Negro* in Mathare. We'd sourced some funds and distributed 1000 leaflets written '*Unga Ksh30*'. At the *Kwa Negro* meeting, we demanded from the government that the price of *unga* drops back to what the people were used to: Ksh30. We also used the meeting to signal to the government that we

were serious on confronting the state on the matter of affordable foodstuff prices for the underclass."

Following that meeting, *Bunge la Mwananchi* planned how they would organise a march into Nairobi's central business district. They also agreed that they needed to properly frame their message for it to have greater visibility and impact.

"That's how we came up with the term *Unga Revolution*. I think I coined the term," recalls Gacheke Gachihi who was actively involved. "So, from the *Unga Ksh30* leaflets to *Unga Revolution*, we radicalised our message and hoped that the people, our people, would join us in demanding from the government, an overhaul of the maize meal prices."



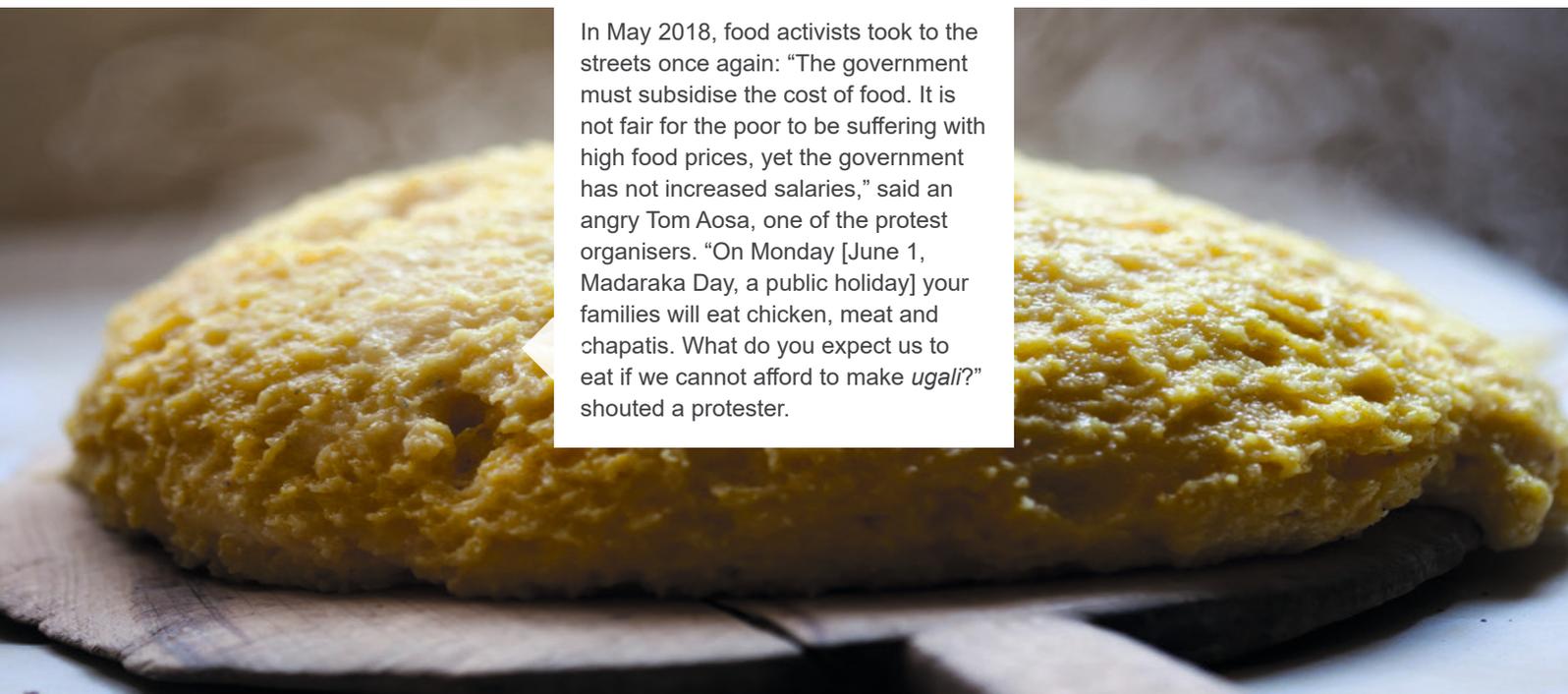


Just as in the past, Kenyans have fought against the curtailment of their right to freedom of association and freedom of speech, will the pandemic reignite the spirit of the *Unga Revolution*?

But even though on 7 July 2011 the *Bunge la Mwananchi*-driven *Unga Revolution* was prevented by a combined force of the police and the paramilitary from accessing downtown Nairobi and proceeding to Harambee Avenue where both the Office of the President and that of the Prime Minister were situated, it captured the national imagination and helped to spur a modern food rights movement in Nairobi and throughout Kenya. “The *unga* campaign was a major force. It led the government into asking the maize millers to start packing the five-kilogram *unga* bags for the rank and file,” said Gacheke.

A year after the Jubilee team of President Uhuru Kenyatta and William Ruto took power, in March 2013, food activists were back in town. This time they were demanding that the government reject a Bill proposing 16 per cent value added tax (VAT) on essential food commodities. Their campaign was dubbed *No Unga Tax*. The activists printed 100,000 posters and plastered them across downtown Nairobi.

Food protests have throughout history been instrumental in shaping government policy regarding access to adequate food for all. And while *unga* has been used effectively as a symbol to rally Kenyans into agitating for food rights, Kenyans are yet to fully realise that it is the responsibility of the government to ensure that its citizens can access affordable and nutritionally diverse meals. Just as in the past, Kenyans have fought against the curtailment of their right to freedom of association and freedom of speech, will the coronavirus pandemic reignite the spirit of the *Unga Revolution*? ♥



In May 2018, food activists took to the streets once again: “The government must subsidise the cost of food. It is not fair for the poor to be suffering with high food prices, yet the government has not increased salaries,” said an angry Tom Aosa, one of the protest organisers. “On Monday [June 1, Madaraka Day, a public holiday] your families will eat chicken, meat and chapatis. What do you expect us to eat if we cannot afford to make *ugali*?” shouted a protester.

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About the Route to Food Initiative

The Route to Food Initiative is a publicly funded programme of the Heinrich Böll Stiftung in Nairobi. Through the initiative, a Route to Food Alliance has formed that works towards realising the Human Right to Food in Kenya. Our activities aim to influence the political approach to food security and target avenues related to policy development and implementation at national and county-level. Additionally, the initiative relies on creative communications and an influencer-led campaign to promote innovative solutions to the problem of food insecurity. We engage with mainstream and alternative media to shift the emphasis of hunger and unaffordable or inadequate food to a discussion about food rights.

You can join the Route to Food Alliance via www.routetofood.org. If you would like a copy of this publication, it will be available on our website or can be ordered by emailing info@routetofood.org or calling Felistus on +254(0)202680745.

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Human Right to Food.**

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the politics of hunger.**

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