I-CAN POLICY BRIEF: UNLOCKING KENYA'S POTENTIAL FOR HEALTH, RESILIENCE, AND INCLUSIVE GROWTH

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SUMMARY

Climate change and malnutrition are deeply intertwined challenges in Kenya, where climate-related shocks continue to threaten food systems, health services, and vulnerable populations. This policy brief summarizes findings from a rapid assessment of 27 national policies and key stakeholder interviews, conducted to support the I-CAN initiative. The analysis reveals uneven climate–nutrition integration across sectors, with strong implementation frameworks in some policies but persistent gaps in coordination, data systems, and financing. Overreliance on donor funding, limited engagement of diverse stakeholders, and underutilized governance structures further hinder progress. At the same time, there are clear opportunities to strengthen policy alignment, institutional reform, cross-sector collaboration, and stakeholder inclusion to build a more resilient and nutrition-secure Kenya.

INTRODUCTION

In Kenya, climate and nutrition interact strongly; over 70% of the population is employed in climate-sensitive sectors such as agriculture, tourism, and water, and communities across the country face recurrent climate-related disasters (Omondi and Akinyi 2021). Flooding, droughts, and environmental degradation have intensified food insecurity, contributed to outbreaks of vector- and waterborne diseases, and compromised the delivery of essential health and nutrition services (Lakew et al. 2021). These events compound long-standing nutrition challenges, including high levels of stunting, wasting, and micronutrient deficiencies, as well as rising rates of overweight and obesity, particularly in urban areas (Kimani-Murage et al. 2015). According to data from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO 2024), about 27.8 percent of Kenya's population is undernourished, reflecting persistently high levels of food insecurity that threaten human development and economic growth, and posing a serious obstacle to human development and economic growth.

Recognising that these types of challenges are felt around the globe, the Initiative for Climate Action and Nutrition (I-CAN) was launched in 2022 by the Government of Egypt during COP27, in partnership with the World Health Organization (WHO), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), and the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement. I-CAN is a global initiative that aims to accelerate transformative action at the intersection of climate and nutrition. By 2030, I-CAN envisions a world in which climate and nutrition agendas are fully integrated in policy, financing, research, and implementation. The initiative focuses on five strategic pillars, the first of which is to support national-level integration by strengthening policy coherence in countries facing both climate vulnerability and high burdens of malnutrition. Specifically, I-CAN targets four key outcomes by 2030:

1. Policy coherence: Greater integration of climate and nutrition across national policies, including NDCs, National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs), national nutrition plans, food-based dietary guidelines, and public food procurement standards.

2. Scaled-up action: Accelerated implementation of climate and nutrition interventions.

3. Increased financing: Mobilization of new and existing resources for integrated climate and nutrition agendas.

4. Cross-sectoral integration: Enhanced alignment of research, advocacy, and policy to advance both nutrition and environmental goals.

METHODS

An assessment was conducted in May and June 2025 to determine the climate and nutrition policy and stakeholder landscape in Kenya. A light-touch policy landscaping analysis drew from the content of 27 policies, encompassing policies that are active, inactive, and at the draft stage. The policies reviewed cover the thematic categories of nutrition and health, climate and environment, food systems and agriculture, and general development. The policy landscaping findings were complemented by themes and results drawn from key informant interviews (KIIs) held with 16 Kenyan nutrition and climate stakeholders, including government actors, development partners, academics, and more. The level of nutrition and climate integration of each policy was evaluated using the 2023 I-CAN Baseline Assessment criteria:

Level 1: No intentional connectedness between climate and nutrition

Level 2: Some intention to connect climate and nutrition

Level 3: Intention to mobilise resources to connect climate and nutrition

Level 4: Commitment to mobilising resources and with distinct plans to take action to connect climate and nutrition

KEY RESULTS

Out of the 27 policies reviewed, 12 were classified as Level 4 of integration, 3 as Level 3, 4 as Level 2, and 8 as Level 1.

Key result 1. Uneven climate–nutrition integration across sectors.

Under Kenya's governance system, established in 2010 under the revised Constitution, the national government manages policy direction and county governments oversee localized implementation. Under this structure, Kenya's 47 counties oversee most health, agriculture, and nutrition services (Government of Kenya 2010; World Bank 2023). Highly decentralised, this division of labor often results in weak alignment between national frameworks and county priorities, indicators, and budgets.

There is a significant opportunity to improve coherence between national strategies and county-level implementation by aligning timelines, indicators, and financing mechanisms with County Integrated Development Plans (CIDPs). Many Level 4 policies already include detailed implementation frameworks, but they often depend solely on local execution. Strengthening the alignment between national strategies and county-level implementation would ensure national commitments are translated into county-level action. Additionally, Level 2 and 3 policies (such as the Climate Change Finance Policy and School Meals and Nutrition Strategy) acknowledge the effects of climate change but fall short of integrating nutrition-specific indicators or frameworks into planning. These policies could be revised to include climate resilience goals, measurable nutrition indicators, joint monitoring systems, and cross-sectoral budget lines. Finally, embedding the I-CAN initiative into existing multisectoral platforms like the Climate-Smart Agriculture Multi-Stakeholder Platform (CSA MSP) through integrating its principles, coordination mechanisms, and objectives would promote harmonization across health, agriculture, and environment sectors, and help link fragmented stakeholder efforts.

Key result 2. Strong Implementation Frameworks in High-Performing Policies

Several Kenyan policies stand out for their detailed implementation plans that move beyond aspirational goals into actionable commitments. The Agriculture Sector Transformation and Growth Strategy (ASTGS 2019–2029) includes nine flagships, the last of which focuses specifically on monitoring climate and food system risks such as pests, diseases, and price shocks. This flagship directly supports nutrition by aiming to protect four million vulnerable households through improvements to the Strategic Food Reserve. It also features yearly milestones, defined timelines, and budget estimates. Similarly, the NCCAP III (2023–2027) includes a dedicated implementation matrix under its Food Security and Nutrition priority area, outlining clear objectives, budgets, indicators, and responsible institutions to build resilience and productivity in a low-carbon manner. The Climate Smart Agriculture Strategy features one of the most comprehensive frameworks, detailing each thematic area's strategies, indicators, institutions, and budget lines. The National Food and Nutrition Security Policy Implementation Framework (2017–2022) adds a strong results-oriented matrix focusing on improving food availability and includes climate adaptation in agriculture, with specific responsibilities assigned to the Ministry of Agriculture and the Treasury. Across these policies, the inclusion of resource mobilization strategies (such as those found in GESIP and Vision 2030) underscores a serious commitment to operationalizing the climate-nutrition nexus.

Key result 3. Critical Gaps in Cross-Sectoral Coordination and Data Systems

A common challenge across climate and nutrition sectors is the lack of shared indicators and integrated monitoring systems. Developing a set of cross-sectoral climate–nutrition indicators would help track progress, improve transparency, and support evidence-based policymaking. These indicators should be incorporated into existing monitoring systems across ministries, including those for health, agriculture, environment, and planning. In parallel, there is a clear need to improve data sharing across sectors by building accessible, linked repositories that can connect meteorological, health, and agricultural datasets. Such systems would provide a strong foundation for joint planning, advocacy, and learning.

Key result 4. Overdependence on Donor Funding

Efforts to integrate climate and nutrition in Kenya remain largely project-driven and heavily reliant on external donor funding, rather than being systematically embedded within national or county budgets. This dependence on short-term projects limits the sustainability and scalability of integrated initiatives. Additionally, coordination platforms such as the Climate Smart Agriculture Multi-Stakeholder Platform (CSA MSP) often operate informally, restricting their ability to mobilize or manage financial resources effectively. Compounding these challenges is the lack of sufficient domestic investment in research, capacity building, and service delivery aligned with climate-nutrition objectives, which further hinders long-term progress. Without institutionalized government support and funding, these coordination platforms will remain vulnerable to external influence and turnover.

Key result 5. Underutilized Stakeholder Engagement Mechanisms

Although public-private dialogue platforms exist in Kenya, their coordination is sporadic and lacks formal structures, limiting their effectiveness. There are significant missed opportunities to integrate value chain actors (such as those involved in fortification or processing of climate-resilient crops) into the design and implementation of policies that support both climate resilience and improved nutrition. Similarly, community-based organizations and grassroots leaders, who are essential for local ownership and sustainability, are not systematically engaged in program planning or delivery, weakening the potential for inclusive and locally responsive solutions.

Key result 6. Opportunities for Policy Alignment and Institutional Reform

To strengthen multisectoral collaboration, coordination platforms and working groups must be formally institutionalized. Many existing forums, such as technical working groups and county nutrition platforms, lack legal mandates and predictable financing, limiting their impact and sustainability. Institutionalizing these platforms through policy or legislative frameworks would ensure consistent participation, clearer accountability, and more durable results. In addition, Kenya would benefit from establishing a high-level coordinating body, such as a national food and nutrition council with legal authority and cross-ministerial reach. This body could provide overarching governance and define sector-specific responsibilities, drawing from models successfully implemented in countries like Ghana, Zambia, and Rwanda.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Institutional Coordination.** To strengthen multisectoral collaboration, platforms like the Sector Working Committee (SWC) and Technical Working Groups (TWGs) should be formally institutionalized through policy or legislation. A coordinating body at the highest level of government, such as a national food systems and nutrition council with legal authority, government funding, and cross-ministerial representation, should be established to oversee governance, align sectoral responsibilities, and harmonize policies, financing, and monitoring frameworks across the sectors involved with nutrition and climate. This model builds on successful approaches from countries like Ghana, Zambia, and Rwanda.

- **Financing.** To ensure sustainable and accountable climate–nutrition integration, Kenya should establish dedicated budget lines anchored in legal frameworks and invest in coordination budgets for multi-sector platforms. This includes embedding priorities in statutory budgets (e.g., Kenya's Medium-Term Expenditure Framework, a three-year rolling policy, planning, and budgeting framework), creating joint financing streams, and aligning with existing frameworks like the Public Finance Management Act, Climate Change Act, CIDPs, and NAPs. Fiscal incentives (such as tax breaks or subsidies for climate-resilient innovations) and stronger budget tracking tools should be explored. Donor investments should be aligned with government-led strategies to reduce fragmentation and enhance long-term impact. Counties will require technical, political, and financial support to effectively implement CNAPs and drive localized action.

- **Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning.** To strengthen evidence-based decision-making and policy alignment at the climate–nutrition nexus, it is recommended to: (i) develop cross-sectoral indicators integrated into existing systems such as CIMES, NCCAP, NAPs, CNAPs, and KNBS datasets; and (ii) enhance data sharing through a centralized, accessible dashboard linking climate, health, and agriculture data. These steps will improve transparency, enable real-time exchange, and support coordinated planning and advocacy.

- **Stakeholder Engagement.** Increase community awareness of the climate–nutrition nexus by leveraging digital media and promoting climate-resilient traditional crops through farmer outreach, school gardens, and extension services. Integrate value chain actors into policy design and implementation, especially those involved in fortification and crop processing. Strengthen private sector engagement in multi-stakeholder platforms (e.g., ASNET) and support their role in co-financing localized interventions (such as community gardens, irrigation, and storage infrastructure) as well as promoting behavior change through media and youth-led campaigns. Private actors also play a key role in resilience-building through services like agricultural insurance, improved seeds, and livestock vaccines.

CONCLUSION

Integrating climate and nutrition policies offers Kenya a powerful dual opportunity: to protect human health and safeguard the environment. Strengthened coordination across sectors can reduce malnutrition, enhance resilience to climate shocks, and promote sustainable food systems that nourish people while restoring ecosystems. By aligning policies, financing, and data systems, Kenya can advance a pathway that simultaneously improves nutrition outcomes, lowers disease burdens, and drives climate adaptation through greener, more efficient agriculture. Embedding these priorities into existing institutions will ensure that gains for people and the planet are mutually reinforcing and enduring.

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