

NURTURING CHANGE

KENYA COUNTRY FACTSHEET

When people think of Kenya, many would think of breathtaking landscape, the colourful jumping displays of the Maasai people, and the 'big five' – lion, elephant, buffalo, leopard and rhinoceros can all be found in the wild. Yet despite a booming tourist trade, nearly half of the population still live in desperate poverty, and a lack of an open and fair tax system means that infrastructure and services that should be provided by the government are sorely missing.

Facts and statistics

- Population of 41.6 million (20 million are under 18 years old).¹
- Average life expectancy at birth is just 57 years.²
- Gross national income of US\$820 per capita per year – or just over US \$2 a day.³
- Classified as one of the world's least developed countries by the United Nations and ranks just 143 out of 187 countries on the Human Development Index.⁴
- Around 2.1 million people do not have secure sources of food.⁵ Changing weather patterns and frequent droughts in the past decade have made it very difficult for farmers to grow enough to feed their families or surplus to sell on.
- Two in five people do not have access to clean drinking water. This rises to one in two in rural areas.⁶
- Key exports include tea, coffee and fresh flowers.

Country background

Kenya is a country of natural beauty and abundant wildlife. Since independence from Britain in 1963, it has struggled to realise its potential. The economic growth it has seen has not translated into the even distribution of benefits, and 45.5 per cent of the population continue to live in extreme poverty.⁷

Kenya, like many developing countries, suffers from a lack of tax-generated revenue to invest in its own



development. As is the case in many developing countries, some unscrupulous multinational companies exploit Kenyan resources and manage to dodge the taxes they owe. Christian Aid estimates that from 2005-2007, Kenya lost over £32m through transfer mispricing⁸ alone (a method of transferring profits to tax havens and avoiding paying tax in the country where the product originated). This is money that could be spent on roads, schools, hospitals and medical staff. The actual figure that is lost every year is likely to be much higher, as this is an estimate of only one kind of tax dodging in a context that is by definition shady and difficult to get accurate information in.

Kenya's presidential elections early in 2013 passed without the levels of violence seen during the 2007 campaign. Although the results were not completely uncontroversial, with Uhuru Kenyatta securing victory with the narrow majority of 50.03 per cent, the relatively peaceful response to this important moment in Kenya's democratic history gives hope that the political landscape will become a more settled environment and one that is conducive to development and prosperity.



Christian Aid/Antoinette Powell

Christian Aid works with partners to promote fair tax regimes that would provide the investment needed for schools and other services

History and culture

The Cushite people are believed to be the first settlers in Kenya, arriving in around 2000BC. Trade developed along the coast with Arab merchants from the first century, and at about the same time Bantu and Nilotic people settled in the area. Swahili then evolved as a mixture of Arabic and Bantu languages to serve as a lingua franca for tradespeople and spread throughout the population.

Kenya gained independence from Britain in 1963, having been a British protectorate from 1895 and then a crown colony from 1920. Jomo Kenyatta became Kenya's first president and served until his death in 1978.

Today, the Kikuyu people (Bantu-speaking Africans) are the largest of Kenya's 40-plus tribes, and dominate the political landscape. Many tribes have adopted modern western lifestyles; however some (including the Masai) retain strong cultural traditions. The major religion of the country is Christianity, although many people incorporate traditional beliefs and ancestor worship into their faith.



Christian Aid/Lodi Babbar

Maize is a staple crop in Kenya

Maize is the staple food of Kenyans. It is ground into flour and prepared as a kind of porridge called posho or ugali. This is sometimes mixed with mashed beans or peas, potatoes, and other vegetables to make a dish called irio. Another popular meal is a beef stew eaten with ugali. This is eaten from a big pot, and each diner takes a piece of ugali, which he or she uses as a spoon to pick up beans and other vegetables. Boiled greens, sometimes called mboga, are a common side dish. Banana porridge, called matoke, is another common dish.

HIV and health in Kenya

HIV has devastated areas of Kenya, with 1.1 million children left orphaned by the virus and over 1.6 million adults and children currently living with HIV.⁹ Although the rate of new infections has stabilised at around 100,000 new infections per year, the longer life expectancies of those living with HIV is resulting in a growing burden on an already frail health system.



Christian Aid/Elaine Duigenan

Christian Aid works on HIV in Kenya with partners such as Kenya Women Living with HIV (KENWA), who support women and children living with the virus

Malaria is the leading cause of deaths in children under-five (an estimated 34,000 every year¹⁰), and accounts for one-third of all reported medical cases. Kenya's government has responded to the disease with mass campaigns to ensure children under-five receive free nets and by selling subsidised nets through clinics and health workers. These campaigns have targeted



Christian Aid/Elaine Duigenan

Mothers in Kenya have limited access to healthcare before, during and after birth. Christian Aid supports clinics such as this one in Ndere, south west Kenya



Christian Aid / Elaine Duigenan

Community health workers travel on motorbikes provided by Christian Aid partners to ensure vital healthcare and education reach remote communities in Kenya

pregnant women, encouraging them to use insecticide treated nets and to take an anti-malarial drug at least twice during the course of their pregnancy. However, work needs to continue to make sure that communities know about their rights around malaria, and making sure those most in need receive nets without delay.

Maternal and child health

Maternal and child mortality rates are unacceptably high. There are 490 maternal deaths per 100,000 births nationwide, and the under-five mortality rate is 73 per 1,000 (in the UK this is just six per 1,000).¹¹ Less than half of the population (44 per cent) have a skilled attendant (a trained doctor or nurse) at birth. One-third of all children in Kenya are too short for their age, a sign of chronic malnutrition. One in six children are underweight or too thin for their age.¹²

In his inauguration speech early in 2013, President Uhuru Kenyatta promised free healthcare to all pregnant women and new mothers. The budget has been released and women are now able to access this care for free – however, there hasn't been a corresponding investment in healthcare facilities and so many women are still not getting the help they need. Although the care is free, transport to the hospital or clinic is not. These hidden costs add another barrier to women – particularly in rural areas – accessing care.

Endnotes

- 1 UNICEF, unicef.org
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), undp.org
- 5 United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), unocha.org
- 6 See note 1.
- 7 See note 4.
- 8 *False Profits: robbing the poor to keep the rich tax-free*, Christian Aid report, March 2009.
- 9 UNAIDS, unaids.org
- 10 USAID Kenya, <http://kenya.usaid.gov>
- 11 See note 1.
- 12 World Health Organization (WHO), who.int

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Poverty is an outrage against humanity. It robs people of dignity, freedom and hope, of power over their own lives.

Christian Aid has a vision – an end to poverty – and we believe that vision can become a reality. We urge you to join us.

POVERTY