

# Country profile

World Vision

# Kenya

## GEOGRAPHY

Kenya, located on the east coast of Africa, shares borders with Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan, Uganda and Tanzania. The natural landscape includes a coastal plain with sandy beaches, extensive semi-arid plateaux, fertile highlands and the dramatic Rift Valley which cuts across Kenya from north to south.

The climate ranges from hot and humid on the coast to cool and temperate in the highlands. Rainfall is unreliable throughout much of Kenya, and less than one-fifth of the land is suitable for agriculture.

## PEOPLE

Most of Kenya's 40 million people live in the cooler highlands or the coast, which are best suited to food production. The population will continue to grow rapidly, as almost half the people are under 15 years of age. There are over 40 ethnic groups, mostly with their own language. Kiswahili and English are the national and official languages respectively. About 80 percent of Kenyans are Christians, 10 percent are Muslims and others retain indigenous beliefs. The main cities are Nairobi (the capital), Mombasa (the main port), Nakuru and Kisumu.

## HISTORY

There is evidence of human settlement in this part of Africa dating back thousands of years. Inland, various groups hunted, farmed or kept herds. Along the coast, Africans and Arabs founded trading centres, controlled for a time by the Portuguese.

In the late 1800s, the British decided to protect their interests in Africa by building a railway from Mombasa to Lake Victoria, across what is now Kenya. British rule brought new crops, schools, health services and improved communications; but for the local people it also meant loss of their land, new taxes and forced labour. Resentment of



Map courtesy of The General Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin

colonial rule contributed to the bloody Mau Mau uprising of the 1950s, during which 12,000 Africans died. Despite this, the pressure for self-government continued and eventually succeeded. In 1963, Kenya achieved its independence and after years as a one-party state, Kenya held multi-party elections in 1992 and 1997. Although ethnic tensions and charges of corruption led to protests and some deaths, President Moi and the Kenya African National Union remained in power from 1978 until 2002.

In 2002, Mwai Kibaki of the Democratic Party of Kenya won the presidency on an anti-corruption platform. The Kibaki government introduced reforms on issues such as child rights, education, press freedom and policy on HIV and AIDS. After the 2007 elections, President Kibaki and his challenger Raila Odinga both claimed victory, leading to violent unrest displacing 300,000 people and claiming 1,500 lives. Kibaki and Odinga set up a coalition government to stem the violence with Kibaki serving as President and Odinga as Prime Minister. Under the new constitution approved by voters in August 2010, the position of prime minister is set to be abolished. Corruption, unemployment, and the prevalence of HIV and AIDS continue to be major challenges in Kenya.

## ECONOMY

Most Kenyans still depend on the land for a living. There have been cycles of drought and famine over the past decade. Thousands lost livelihoods, livestock died from starvation and crops failed. Even in good times, farmers must keep a delicate balance between their herd size and the feed available. Climate change threatens to worsen



Children's clubs supported by World Vision provide opportunities for children to learn about their rights and important life skills.

an already difficult situation. Tea is the leading agricultural export, followed by coffee, flowers and various vegetables and fruits. Unfortunately world prices for these products fluctuate wildly, affecting the incomes of farmers.

As the population grows, there is intense pressure on the land and other natural resources. The government hopes to increase crop yields by improving services to small farmers and by introducing new grain varieties. Soil conservation and reforestation are essential to protect the land. Women's vital role as food producers, farmers and child-minders is gradually being recognised.

Many landless people and poor farmers are moving to towns, but there are not enough jobs in Nairobi and other cities to meet the huge demand and youth unemployment is a serious problem. In 2006, following a financial corruption scandal, international banks halted loans to Kenya. Post-election violence in early 2008, coupled with the impacts of the global financial crisis, reduced estimated GDP growth to two percent or lower in 2008 and 2009.

### LIVING CONDITIONS

Many Kenyans live in compounds of thatched mud huts or timber houses, surrounded by banana trees, plots of maize and coffee trees. Others move with their cattle in search of pasture. Some work in the tourism industry, in hotels and the famous wildlife parks.

In Nairobi, life is tough for those who lack well-paid jobs. They live in slums and earn a meagre living by selling vegetables and second-hand clothes, cooking food or doing odd jobs. Although the government is providing shelter and education for many former street children, many others still survive by scavenging, begging or stealing. Few Kenyans have a piped water supply and proper sanitation. Even fewer have electricity; so wood, charcoal or kerosene is used for fuel.

The staple diet includes thick porridge (ugali) made from maize flour, served with vegetables (sukuma wiki). Very



World Vision is working to ensure that children like Faith have access to nutritious food and healthcare.

## Comparatively speaking...

CATEGORY	KENYA	AUSTRALIA
Population	40.9 million	21.5 million
Urban population (as % of total)	22.2%	89.1%
GNI per capita (US\$ PPP)	\$1,628	\$38,692
Population with access to an improved water source	59%	100%
Adult literacy rate	86.5%	99%
Population living below US\$1.25 (PPP) a day	19.7%	0%
Under five mortality rate (deaths per 1,000 live births)	128	6
Life expectancy at birth	55.6 years	81.9 years

Source: United Nations Development Programme  
Human Development Report 2010

few people can afford meat. The poorest people cannot afford enough food, and malnutrition contributes to many child deaths.

Government health services face funding shortages and are not within the reach of all Kenyans. People still suffer from pneumonia, tuberculosis, malaria and illnesses related to poor sanitation, such as enteritis and diarrhoea. Although the number of new transmissions has decreased in recent years, Kenya still has one of the highest HIV infection rates in the world, especially in urban areas. It is estimated that between 1.6 million and 1.9 million Kenyans currently live with the disease. In 2002, circumcision of girls under 18 was banned, a major step forward for women's health, but the campaign to ensure the practice is completely eliminated continues.

### EDUCATION

Free and compulsory primary education was introduced by the Kibaki government in 2003, but schools today are still struggling to cope with the influx of new students. There is considerable strain on resources, classrooms and teachers. Secondary education incurs high fees. As a result, not many can afford a secondary education, and fewer still go on to tertiary education. Nevertheless, increasing numbers of men and women are able at least to read and write. The challenge for Kenya is to feed, house and employ a growing population while protecting the land on which it depends.

### WORLD VISION AUSTRALIA IN KENYA

- Sponsored children, their families and communities are assisted with basic needs such as education, immunisation, clean water and better nutrition.
- Urban families, especially those headed by women, are provided with access to loans to establish small businesses. Vocational training also assists families to find employment.
- People affected by drought or floods receive emergency relief.

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