

## **BUNGOMA DISTRICT - BACKGROUND, STATISTICS & POVERTY**

Bungoma district is a border district in Western Kenya. It borders the Republic of Uganda to the West and lies between latitude 0° 25.3' and 0° 53.2' north and longitude 34° 21.4' and 35° 04' East. To the north, it borders Trans-Nzoia district to the East Kakamega district to the south Mumias Butere district and southwest it borders Busia and Teso districts. It covers a land area of 2,068.5 km<sup>2</sup> or a quarter of western province.

The district has ten administrative divisions, comprising 44 locations and 114 sub-locations. Administrative boundaries however, are undergoing reviews at the time of writing this project, which may lead to new districts, divisions, locations and sub-locations.

The land in Bungoma generally slopes from the foot of Mt. Elgon from the North where the altitude is over 2000 metres above sea level falling to the lower lying South and South West of altitude 1200 metres. Four major rivers drain the land, river Nzoia forms the boundary to the West with Lugari and Butere Mumias, river Lwakhakha forms another boundary with Uganda to the West while Kuywa and Chwele and Khalaba rivers drain the middle areas.

The district has a two-season rain regime, the long rains covering March to July while the short rains start in August to October. The average precipitation ranges from 1250 mm to 1800 mm with the central and north areas receiving a higher amount. Temperature variations are very moderate ranging from 21-25° centigrade during the year. The district is endowed with well-drained, rich and fertile arable soils but poor husbandry methods and a bulging population have resulted in declining yields, deforestation and soil erosion.

### **Human Settlement**

The population of the district is estimated at 1.2 million in 2006. It is evenly distributed with an average population density of 482 persons per square km. There are heavier population concentrations in the main urban centres and major factories. These include Webuye (Pan Paper Mills), Nzoia Sugar Company, Bungoma Town, Kimilili, Sirisia, Malakisi Tobacco Leaf Centre Chwele and Tongaren. Urban population is about 30 per cent of the total.

The main economic activity is subsistence agriculture with maize, sunflower, sugarcane, coffee, tobacco, potatoes, beans and some cattle being the main crops. Of the total labour force of about 565,000, 52 percent are engaged in agricultural production which provides 60 percent all household incomes; 19 percent wage employment, 13 percent urban self-employment. The number of unemployed is estimated at 200,000.

60 percent of the population live below the poverty line. The poverty line is an average income of 1,239 KSh (US \$17) per month for rural and 2,648 KSh for urban households which provides the minimum nutritional requirements. The poverty incidence in Bungoma is higher than the national average of 53 percent.

The poverty incidence per constituency is as follows: -

Constituency	Est. Population	Est. No. of Poor	Poverty Incidence % Below Poverty Line
Kimilili			
Webuye	168,484	99,164	60
Sirisia	177,793	103,242	58
Kanduyi	155,205	94,054	61
Bumula	127,240	65,908	52

Typical characteristics of the population include high unemployment, low participation of locals in commercial enterprises, low agricultural productivity, child labour due to high school dropout rate, high dependency ratio, high population growth and a high youth/adult ratio.

### **Causal Factors of Poverty in Bungoma**

The major causes of poverty are varied but majorly due to ignorance (lack of access to information), cultural practices, population growth, rural – urban migration and lack of infrastructure.

#### **a. Ignorance**

Ignorance or lack of access to information is a major handicap to human development in Bungoma. The primary school age population (6-13) is 245,000 of which the school enrolment is 97%. However, the dropout for boys is 57.5% and 53% for girls by Standard Eight. The enrolment at secondary school is 29% for boys and 26.5% for girls with a further drop out rate at 26.5% and 30% respectively for girls. This works out to about 40,000 who complete secondary school or a mere 17%. The majority of the population in Bungoma is literate with primary education. Even those who complete secondary school education, only 3% proceed to tertiary institutions. The rest join the unemployed and indulge in menial occupations such as *boda- boda* or bicycle taxis, as they have limited employable skills.

Ignorance is not only limited to the youthful population. Indeed the productive potential of the district could be enhanced greatly by improving access to information and knowledge. All sectors including education, health, agriculture, afforestation (environment) and commerce would stand to gain a great deal by skills enhancement and new knowledge propagation systems.

#### **b. Cultural Practices**

Bungoma district is considered conservative and traditionalist. Although culture has many positive benefits to the community such as social ethics and cohesion, ignorance of modern knowledge and monetary economy greatly compromises the future of the youthful population.

#### **c. Circumcision**

Circumcision of boys takes place every two years. The circumcision rites are disruptive to the education of boys and pose great pregnancy risks to adolescent girls'. The rites also place a heavy economic burden on the community by diverting badly needed resources. Research by the IcFEM mission in Kimilili revealed that between 22,000 and 26,000 boys are initiated every season (every other year). The average expenditure in traditional

circumcision is 40,000 KSh or US \$600. This is a significant leakage of resources amounting to hundreds of millions of shillings and most of the initiates cannot complete secondary school for lack of school fees when two years equivalent of fees is spent on one ceremony. The reason they do it is partly due to the ignorance on the part of the parents about the alternative approaches.

**d. Funeral Rites**

These are another source of resource leakage. Funeral ceremonies take place over days and even weeks where large numbers of mourners congregate at the deceased home. Animals are slaughtered and large quantities of food are prepared for the mourners. The cumulative economic burden is quite substantial ranging from about 20,000 KSh to several hundred thousand depending on the economic status of the household. The youth are the losers in the final analysis.

**e. Marriage**

In marriage, polygamy is a common practice. It contributes significantly to the fast growing population. Many families have as many as twenty children whose parents are ill equipped to afford a decent education.

**f. Rural–Urban Migration**

The education system is skewed to white collar employment and imparts no practical day-to-day living skills. Graduates of primary, secondary, and even university expect to be employed. This causes a large exodus to urban centres especially Nairobi in search of the elusive white-collar job. Many of the young men are employed as security guards, gardeners, cooks, and other menial cadres. Their wages can hardly sustain them leave alone support their families upcountry. Unable to support the family or even visit with them regularly, it often leads to problems of HIV/AIDS, broken marriages and severance of the extended family system. All these consequences lead only on one direction of poverty and more poverty.

The rural-urban migration also depletes the rural areas of able-bodied men who leave behind women as heads of households. The women are less skilled in the use of teams of oxen for cultivation, oxen being the main factor of production. Subsistence farming is the outcome and leads to low agricultural production.

**g. Population Growth**

The district has one of the highest population growth rates in Kenya. In the last 3 census periods 1979, 1989, and 1999 population growth rates of 3.8, 2.9 and 4.3 percent respectively were recorded. An analysis of the population structure reveals a largely youthful population, the proportion of the economically unproductive age segment (0-24 years) being 73 percent. This is the basis for the high dependency ratio in the district.

The estimated females in the reproductive age group (16-49 years) in the 1999 census was 197,817. This number is expected to increase to 291,297 by 2008 representing a fertility rate of 7.6. There is thus a great need for family planning campaign programs and increased maternal and health care.

**h. Lack of Infrastructure**

Infrastructure is a major constraint to the development in Bungoma. The district has a total of 1158 km of road of which 165 km are paved. Of the 199,435 households only 4000 have commercial electricity supplies. The number of households with access to piped water is 65,248. The households share 6 hospitals with a doctor/patient ratio of 1:142,446.

**i. ICT Infrastructure**

Perhaps the most critically needed infrastructure is that for Information and Communication. The total number of households with telephones is 957 compared to the total of 199,435 or 1:200. Since the average household size is 5, the teledensity is 0.01 phone lines per 100 people. This is much too inadequate compared to the ITU target of 5 phones per 100 people for developing countries. There are automatic exchanges at Webuye, Bungoma, and Kimilili. Manual exchanges are at Chwele, Sirisia and Malakisi.