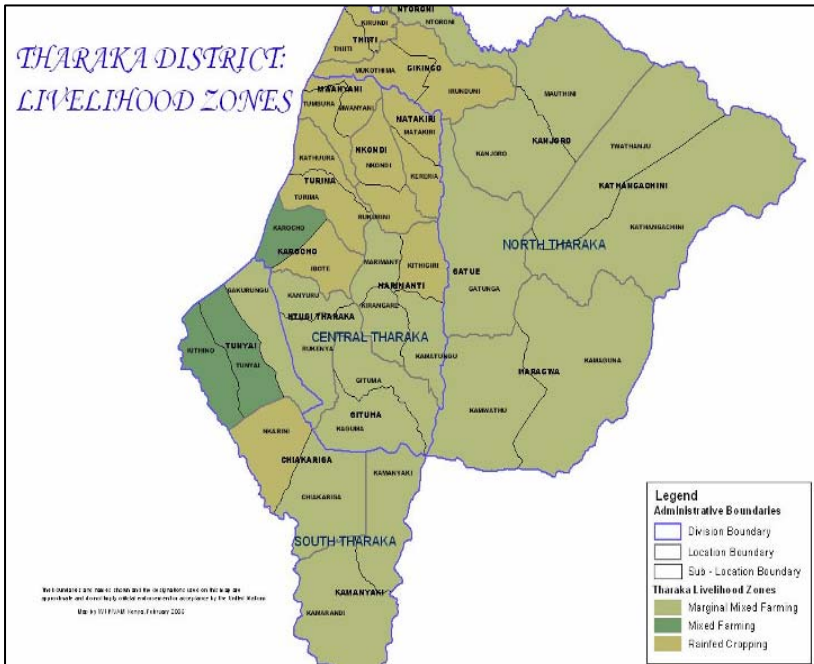




**OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER**  
**MINISTRY OF STATE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF NORTHERN KENYA AND OTHER ARID LANDS**  
**ARID LANDS RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PROJECT II**

**DROUGHT MONITORING BULLETIN, AUGUST 2009**

**Tharaka District**



**Warning Stages**

Livelihood Zone	Warning stage	Trend
Marginal Mixed farming	Alarm	Worsening
Mixed farming	Normal	Worsening
Rain fed cropping	Normal	Stable
District	Alert	Worsening

**Seasonal Calendar**

Short rains			Short dry spell		Long rains			Long dry spell			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Planting/weed &amp; pest control</li> <li>Milk yields increase</li> <li>Low HH food stocks</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Short rains harvest</li> <li>Reduced milk yields</li> <li>Increased HH food stocks</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Planting/weeding</li> <li>High calving rate</li> <li>Milk yields increase</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Long rains harvest /Land preparation</li> <li>Increased HH food stocks</li> <li>High kidding rate(Sept)</li> </ul>			
Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept

## **Situation overview**

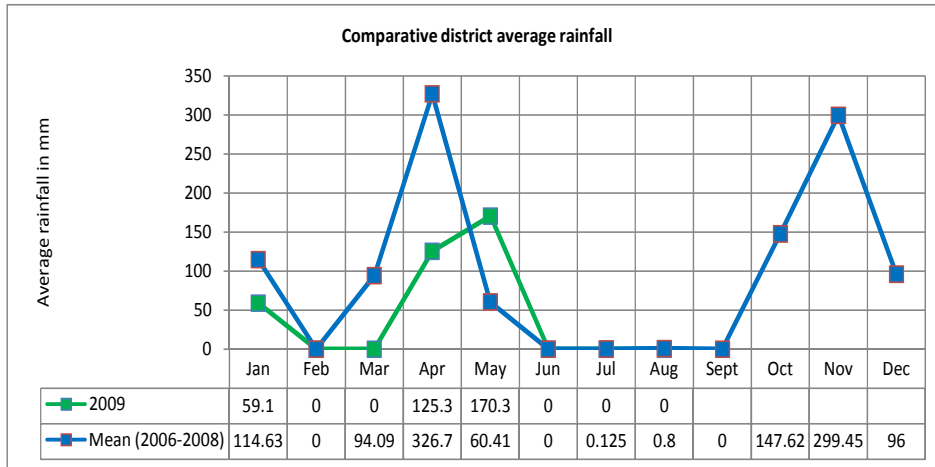
- Sunny weather prevailed most of the days in the month under review. No rains were received in any part of the district.
- Land preparations for October-December short rains were key agricultural activity among households in all livelihood zones. This comes abnormally early due to the fact that the larger portion of the district had zero or negligible harvests last season.
- There was minimal and inadequate forage, particularly in the marginal mixed farming (MMF) livelihood zones of the district. As a result, there were cattle migrations from regions within Tana belt to the interior parts of the district, particularly the rain-fed livelihood zones. Body condition of shoats was fair but on steady decline for cattle, whose pastures got depleted particularly in the MMF zones of the district. Livestock prices were low but normal in all local markets.
- Distances to water sources increased from an average distance of 3km recorded last month (July 09) to 3.4 km. Longer time is also spent due to lengthy queues and congestion at water points. Main water sources utilized by both household and livestock in the month were permanent rivers, boreholes and permanent springs.
- Labor migration (mainly youth) from the drought-stricken marginal mixed farming livelihood zones to the rain fed, mixed farming livelihood zones and to the neighboring Meru districts. In migrations from Igambang'ombe in Mara district and Kyuso/Mbeere to the irrigation project areas of Kithino was also observed in the month under review.
- Crop and other food commodity prices remained high but available in local markets.
- The nutrition status of children below five years declined slightly during the month, with the percentage of those rated at risk of malnutrition increasing from 9.1% July to 10.2%. This was due to drought that has affected over 50% of the district population and despite the ongoing food interventions through food for assets (FFA) and supplementary feeding.

## **Recommendations to KFSSG and DSG**

- March-May long rains failed, leading to drought in the larger part of the district. With October-December short rains forthcoming, households hardly had seed reserves/stocks and therefore require drought-tolerant relief seed for the season, which is more reliable.
- Both short term and long term drought mitigation measures ought to be a priority, especially on soil conservation and rain water harvesting for crop and livestock production.
- Soil and water conservation activities were on going, through FFW by the lead agency, Catholic diocese of Meru.

## 1.0 Environmental indicators (Stability)

### 1.1 Rainfall



**Source: ALRMP II**

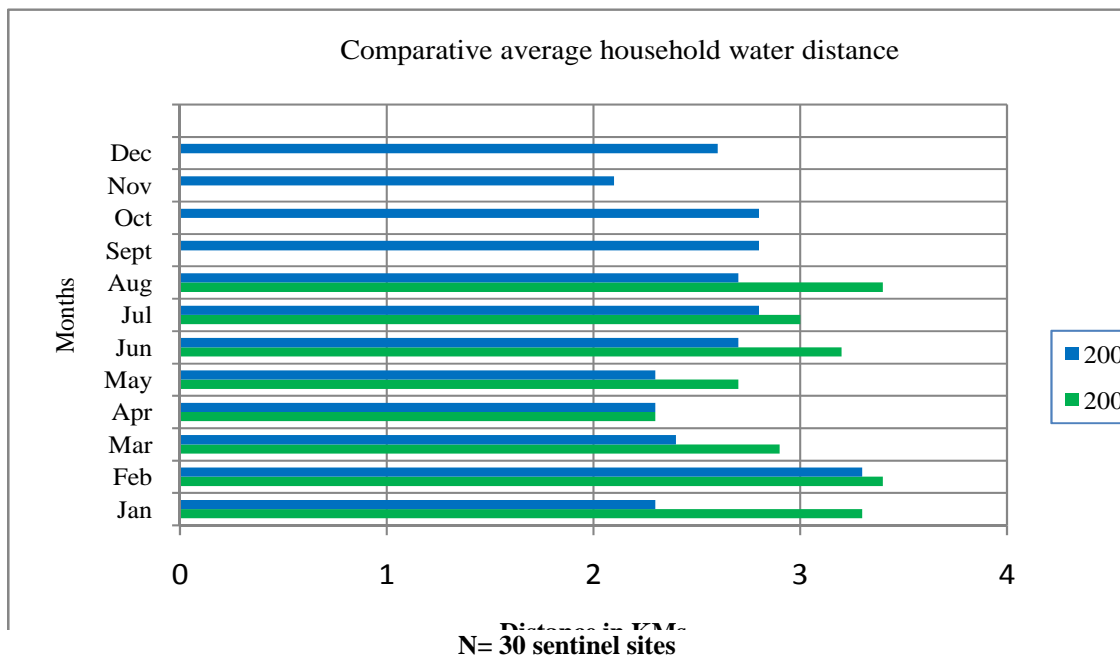
Sunny weather prevailed for most of the days in the month under review, with no rains experienced. This was the climax of the dry season which is expected to prevail till mid October when the short rains set in.

### 1.2 Condition of natural vegetation and pasture

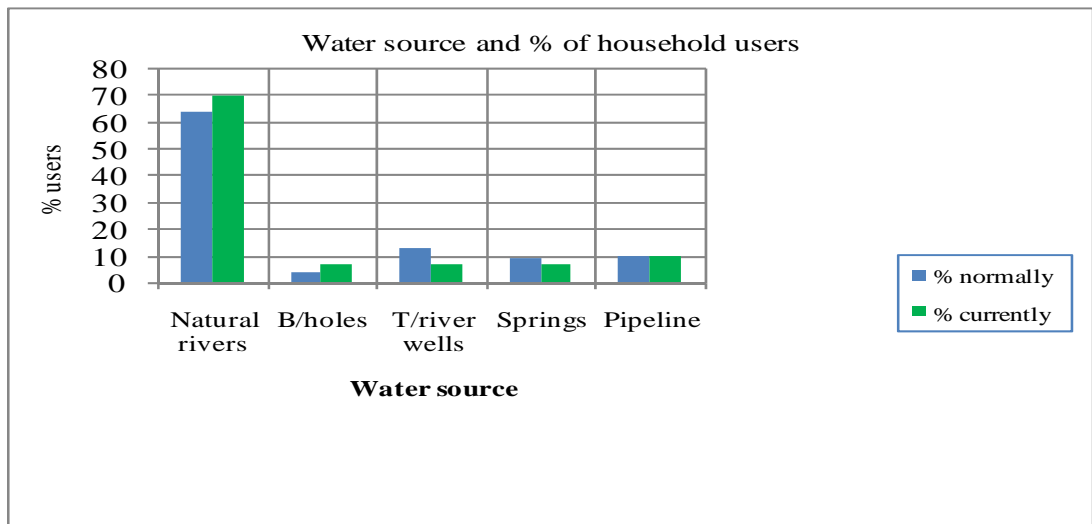
Forage was on steady decline in larger Tharaka district and pasture inadequate in Marginal Mixed farming (MMF) zones. March-May long rains were inadequate and therefore forage development was poor and thus could not sustain livestock until the October-December short rains. As a result, livestock moved from MMF zones to the interior rain-fed parts of the district, in search of pastures. Grazing in river beds and other reserves such as hills is common as forage gets depletion

### 1.3 Water sources and availability

#### 1.3.1 Water sources



- Water situation worsened and average distances increased from 3 km in July to 3.4 km for households and livestock (in most cases, these water sources were utilized by both livestock as well as households).
- The distances were higher than the average distance in 2006-2008 similar period. Permanent water sources such as rivers and boreholes were the major water sources in use and therefore the increased average distance. Seasonal sources hardly held any water.



N= 300 households

Natural rivers were the most utilised (70 %) water sources in the month, with a higher number of users than normal. More people than normal used boreholes while traditional river wells and springs had a lower number of users than normal. The poor yields were attributed to inadequate rains last season and the prolonged dry spell between the seasons.

## 2.0 Rural economy indicators (Food availability)

### 2.0 Livestock production

#### 2.0.1 Livestock body condition

- Body condition of cattle was on the decline, especially in the marginal mixed farming livelihood zones, but fairly stable for shoats. This was due to pasture inadequacy in the aforementioned zone.
- Consequently, this contributed to low livestock prices in the month. Livestock sales were relatively low compared to the past three months. Petty trade was a major income source for most households in marginal mixed farming livelihood zones.

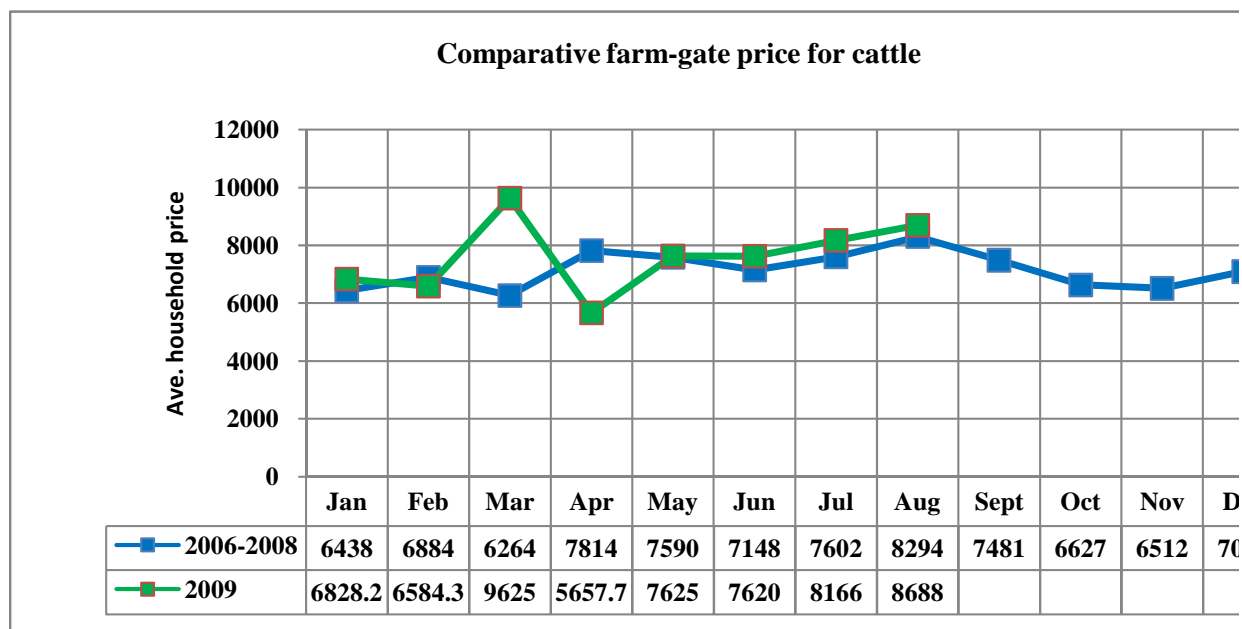
#### 2.0.2 Milk production and consumption

- Milk production continued to decline as forage stress persisted. This, however, had minimal impact on prices as it sold at an average price of Ksh28 per litre. The price was as high as Ksh50 per litre (milk from Meru district traded by vendors.), which was an increase from last month's price of Ksh40. This was mainly sold in the urban centers and their suburbs. These observations were normal for the time of the year.

## 3.0 Access to food

### 3.1 Livestock marketing

#### 3.1.1 Cattle prices

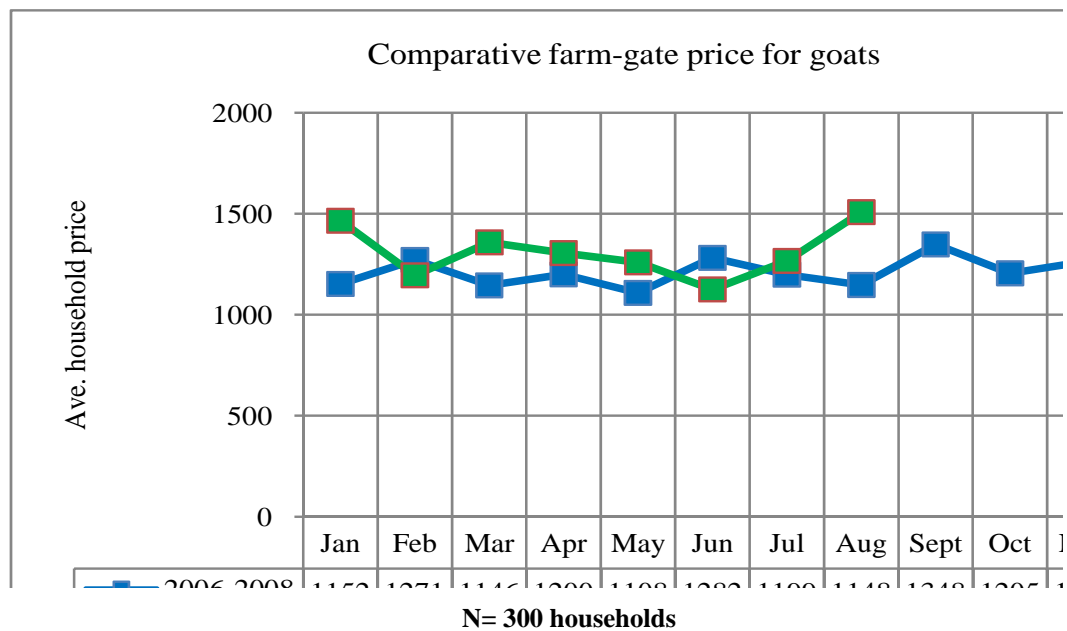


N= 300 households

- There has been a steady increase in the average price for cattle in the past three months. In the last two months, the average price of cattle increased from Ksh8166 to Ksh8688. The price was slightly above the long term mean for years 2006-2008.

- Cattle sales were higher than last month as parents tried to raise fees as schools reopened. The prices were normal.

### 3.1.2 Goat prices

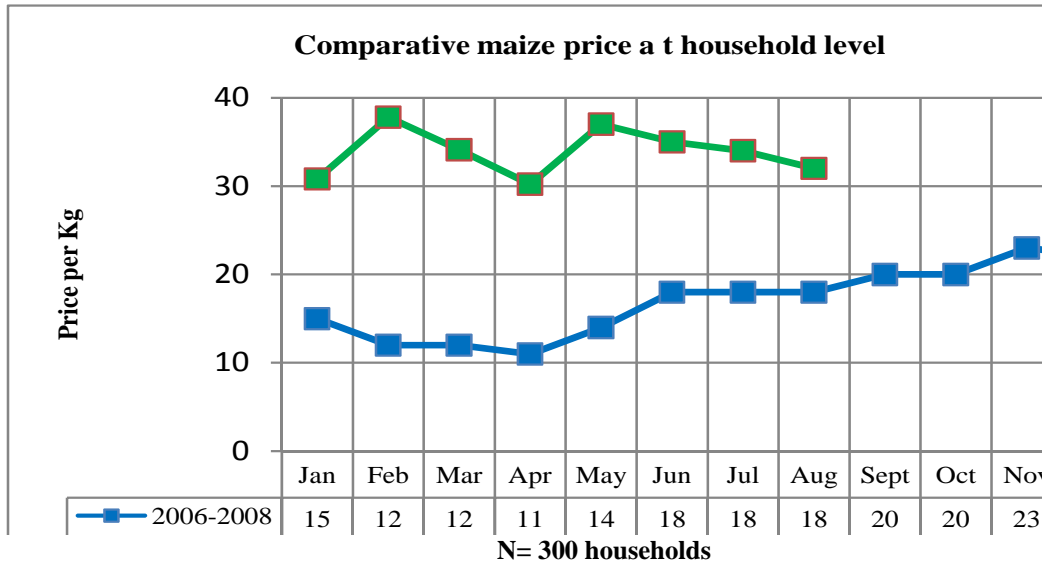


- The average price of goats improved from Ksh1266 recorded last month to Ksh1508. Sales were relatively low as majority of households (44%) turned to casual labor for income. This was a food security livestock commodity in the district, whose average price has been the highest in the last seven months.
- The price was slightly above the long term average price for year 2006-2008 similar period and within seasonal range.

### 3.2 Crop prices

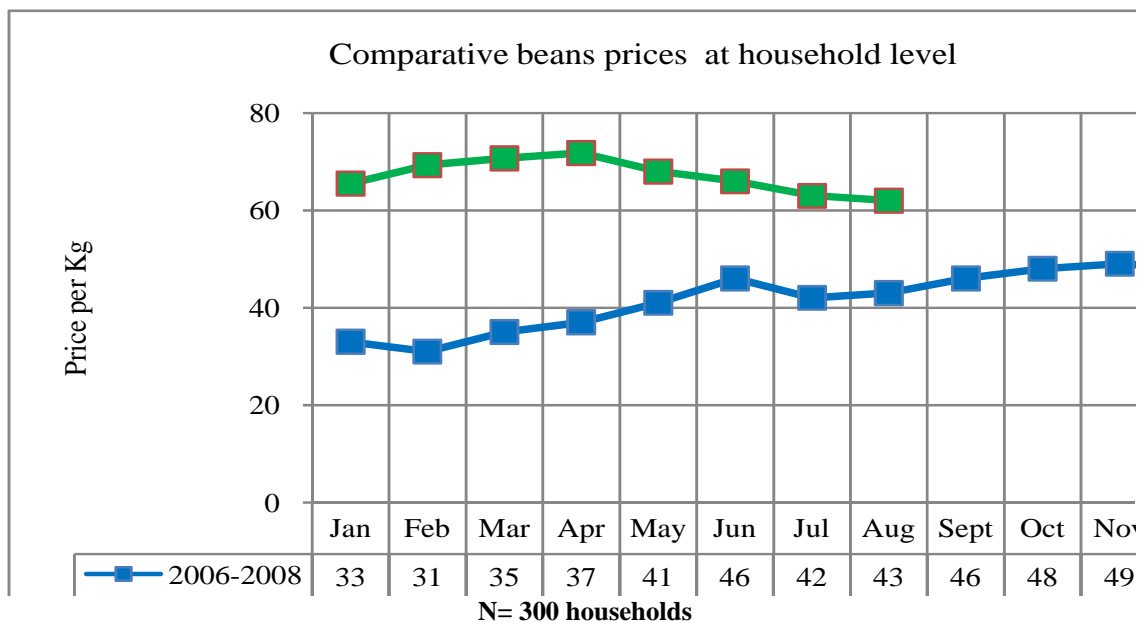
- There was a decline in crop prices in the month under review. Prices were, however, relatively high compared to normal years. The observed price decline was attributed to improved food availability in the markets. Green grams, which are mainly cultivated for income traded at Ksh83 per kilo, a decrease from Ksh85 recorded last month.
- Poor crop performance last season led to food scarcity and therefore the staple foods were mainly sourced from Meru districts and the grain belt of the country. Income from crops contributed 8 % of the household income. The crop prices were far above normal.

### 3.2.1 Maize prices



There was a slight decrease in the average price of maize from Ksh34 per kilo recorded in June to Ksh32. The price, however, stands above the long term mean for years 2006-2008 similar period. The prices recorded in the year were above normal, and this makes this key food commodity almost unaffordable to the majority poor. The district hardly produces adequate maize and therefore a net importer of the crop.

### 3.2.2 Beans prices

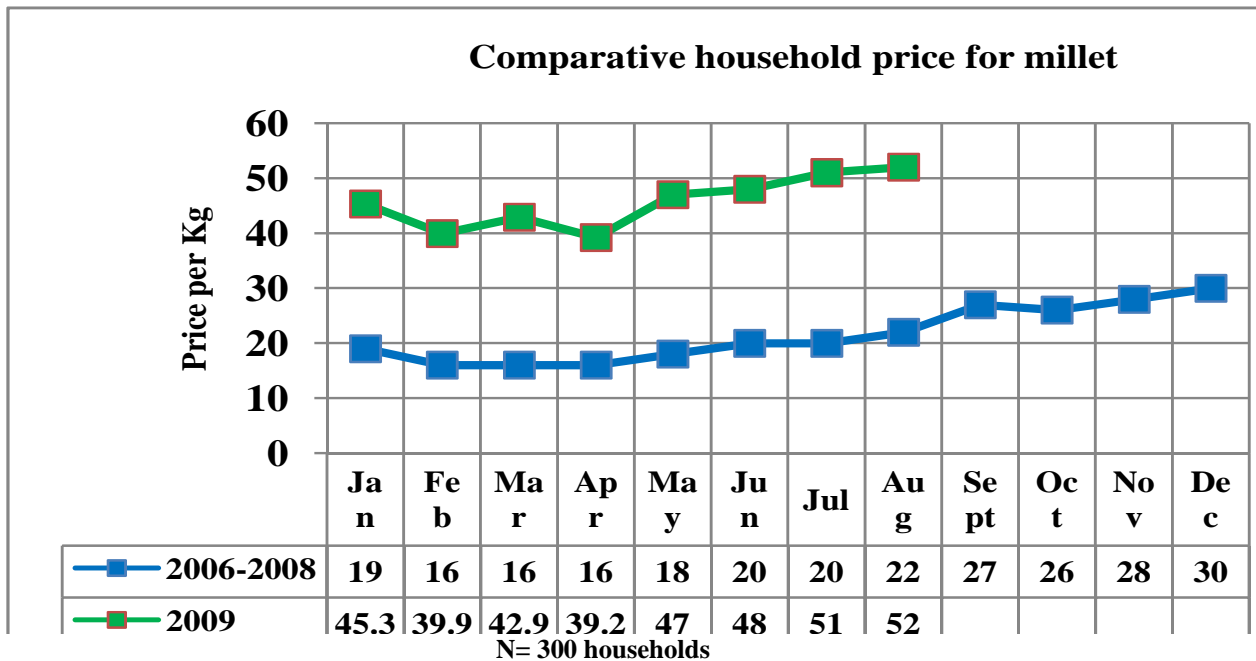


- The average price of beans decreased slightly from Ksh63 recorded last month to Ksh62 per kg. The mixed type (various varieties) was sold at a lower price of Ksh50. The observed price decline could be as a result of availability of substitute pulses in the

market such as pigeon peas, which were harvested in the month (despite its poor performance) and whose price is Ksh55 per kilo.

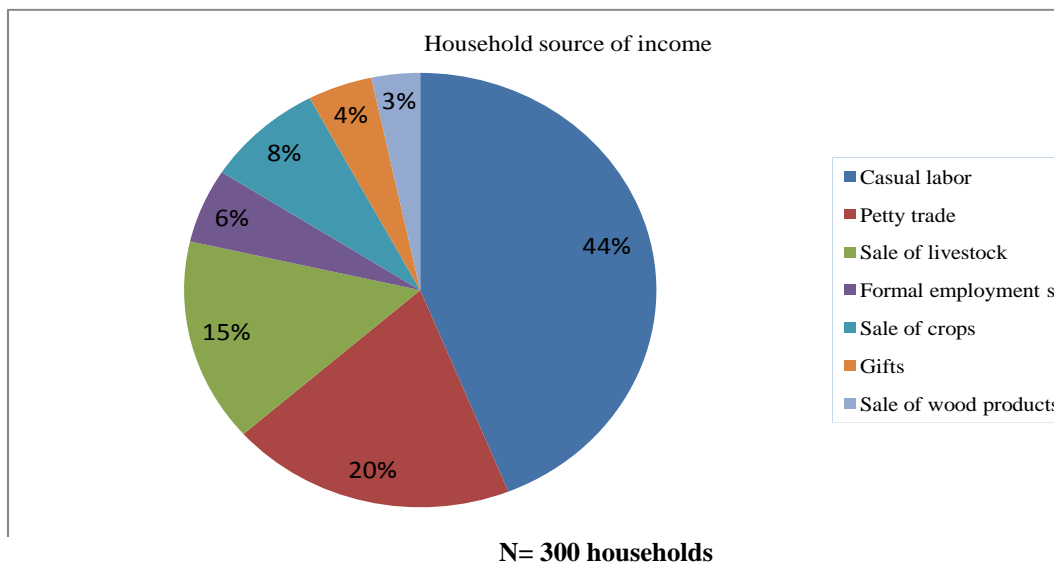
- The prices were abnormally high at the time of the year and higher than the long term average price for years 2006-2008 similar periods. The prices are hardly affordable to the majority poor.

### 3.2.3 Millet prices



- Millet prices remained higher than normal, a common observation in the previous months of the year. The crop's poor performance was a blow to food security of Tharaka community. This crop is mainly cultivated in the entire district mainly for local consumption. Due to its poor performance, households relied on market purchases.
- Millet prices increased from Ksh51 recorded last month to Ksh52 per kilo. The price was abnormally high and far above the long term average for years 2006-2008 similar period. Prices recorded in the year were generally very high and unstable. The observations made were abnormal for the time of the year.

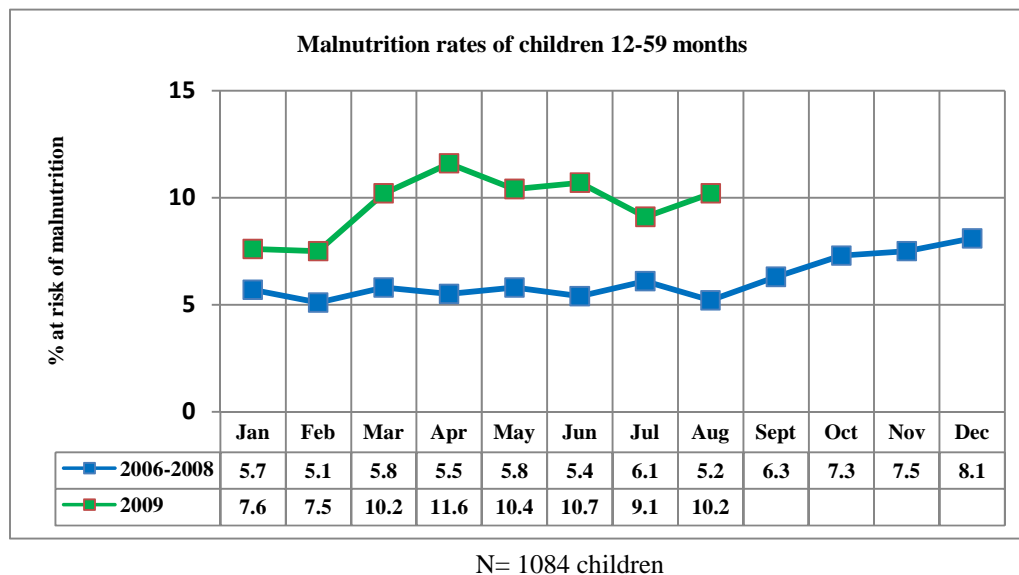
### 3.3 Income



- The major income source for households in the month under review was casual labor, contributing 44% of total household income. This includes labor migrations within and outside Tharaka North and Tharaka South districts.
- Petty trade, which includes roadside food kiosks (common during droughts), contributed 20% of the household income.
- Crop income, which normally contributes largely to household income, contributed 8%, while livestock accounted for 15%.

#### 4.0 Human welfare indicators (Utilization of food)

##### 4.1 Nutrition status



- The nutrition status of children below five years declined slightly during the month, with the percentage of those rated at risk of malnutrition increasing from 9.1% July to 10.2%. Despite the ongoing food interventions through food for assets (FFA) and supplementary feeding, child malnutrition levels worsened due to drought that has affected over 50% of the district population.

- The rates have remained high and unsteady this year. Out of 1,084 children surveyed in the month, 110 of had Middle Upper Arm Circumference (MUAC) less than 135mm. These rates were high for the time of the year and could be attributed to food stress and high prevalence of malaria amongst the age category. The rates were above the long term average for year 2006-2008 for a similar period.

#### **4.2 Human health**

Human health remained normal all month round with no disease outbreaks. Normal ailments such as malaria and URTI were, however, prevalent during the month under review.

#### **5.0 Other coping strategies**

- In the month, households applied various coping strategies (index 1-10) to address daily food needs. These include;
  - Purchase of food on credit
  - Consumption of less preferred food.
  - Borrowing of food from relatives and friends.
  - Reduction of meal sizes.
  - Begging for food increased as hunger bit.
  - Weaving and basketry were vital coping mechanisms in areas of Kamanyaki, Gituma and Kamarandi.
  - Charcoal burning and sand harvesting was also observed, though not extensive.
  - Road side food kiosks operational on market days were also a common feature, especially in marginal mixed farming livelihood zones. These are signs of food stress at household level.

#### **6.0 Recommendations to DSG and KFSM**

- Water levels in all the rivers were low and inadequate even for small-scale agriculture, aimed at addressing food security problem at household level. Due to low water levels, water rationing was common, and this affected crop production. This was due to over utilisation of water upstream, mainly in Meru districts. Rain water harvesting in dams and pans would go far in addressing water scarcity in times of drought and should be prioritized.
- With the prevailing drought situation, households may have inadequate seed to plant for short rains, despite early land preparations. Provision of relief seed would ensure the fields prepared are adequately planted for increased crop production. Relief food to the community and to primary schools should be provided until the next harvest. *Action: District Steering Group & KFSSG*