**Rainfall and Temperature Characteristics in Kibwezi West Sub-County, Kenya**

**Abstract**

Climate variability and change are among the numerous variables that negatively impact the economies of many countries worldwide, especially in Sub-Sahara Africa where over 80% of the population is heavily dependent on rain-fed agriculture for their livelihood. Kenya is an agriculture-based economy and therefore rainfall performance remains critical to her social-economic development. This called for the need to undertake this study in one of the arid and semi-arid (ASALs) regions of the country where agriculture is the primary economic activity. This study analyzed both annual rainfall and annual average temperature characteristics in Kibwezi West sub-county, Kenya. The findings showed that between 1993 and 2023 dry conditions were experienced in 61.3% of the period translating to a drought cycle of once every 2 years, which negatively impacted food security. With a CV of 32%, this implied that annual rainfall was less predictable, heightening the Sub-County’s vulnerability to drought. A PCI value of 17.1 indicated that annual rainfall was not evenly distributed throughout the year. Rainfall was only concentrated in April, May, November and December with most of the other months being dry. The linear regression analysis revealed a negative slope value (-0.4), indicating a downward trend. Specifically, this means that for each passing year, annual rainfall decreased by 0.4mm. For the annual average temperature trend, there was a generally increasing trend of 0.03 degrees per year. These findings suggest that the sub-county was already experiencing climate change and therefore there is a need for the development of climate change adaptation strategies, such as growing drought-tolerant crops to enhance food security and community resilience to climate shocks.

**Keywords:** Climate variability, rainfall, climate change adaptation strategies, climate shocks, food security

**1. Introduction**

The effects of climate change are now being felt globally. There is accumulating evidence of climate change from the ever-increasing greenhouse gas emissions such as the changing rainfall patterns affecting agricultural production thus leading to food insecurity in different parts of the world (Adesete et al., 2023). Climate change and more specifically changes in rainfall and temperature patterns are expected to rise with the increasing global warming, leading to unpredictable negative effects in different parts of the world (Mariappan et al., 2023) such as increased frequency of extreme climatic events as well as inter-annual rainfall variability (Mohammed et al., 2018). As a result, human systems are bound to suffer from the far-reaching impacts of weather pattern changes as well as the regularity and harshness of life-threatening climatic events (Raimi et al., 2021). Regular and severe climatic events such as drought and floods have far-reaching impacts on the economy. They may lead to food insecurity thus affecting long-term progress as well as the economic welfare of different regions in the world.

In Africa, rainfall and temperature variability is expected to increase with the increasing rate of climate variability as well as the consistency and intensity of life-threatening weather events (Chilunjika & Gumede, 2021). However, there is limited expertise in the continent regarding climate change and extreme weather events (Mushawemhuka et al., 2024). Rural residents have been forced to adapt to climate change effects due to the recurrent droughts that have overwhelmed Africa for years. According to Omotoso et al. (2023), rainfall variability in terms of intensity and distribution in Sub-Sahara Africa is expected to rise leading to regular droughts, floods, disease epidemics, pests and weeds including other extreme events. With these increased climate-related threats, the future of rain-fed agriculture in Africa remains increasingly hampered.

Floods, droughts and changes in rainfall patterns are the major effects of climate change in Kenya (Nyika, 2022). Policymakers as well as agricultural officers are engaged in debates on the implications of climate variability and change on smallholder rain-fed agriculture in Kenya. Arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs) occupy over 80% of Kenya’s total land mass, Kibwezi West Sub-County included. These areas have suffered from high levels of food insecurity as a result of rainfall variability and climate change-related effects, such as severe and regular droughts. In line with these findings, Kalisa et al. (2020), recommend that the first step in on-farm management should be the characterization of rainfall and temperature changes at the local level. The increasing climate variability and change have remained a major concern to farmers in Kibwezi West Sub-County. This study, therefore, investigated the annual rainfall and temperature characteristics to help farmers predict climatic patterns for proper planning of their agricultural activities.

# 2. Methodology

# 2.1 Study area

This study was carried out in Kibwezi West Sub-County of Makueni County, Kenya. Makueni County lies within Latitude 1°35' and 3°00' South and Longitude 37°10' and 38°30' East. The county covers an area of 1,184.2 Km² according to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS, 2019). Two distinct rainfall seasons are experienced in the area annually, namely: the long rainfall season (March, April and May) and the short rainfall season (October, November and December). The annual rainfall is erratic averaging at 500mm, while temperature ranges between 20.20°C to 35.800°C (Muia et al., 2024). Rain-fed agriculture remains the mainstay economic activity of the people in the Sub-County.



**Figure 1:** Map of the Study Area

# 2.2 Data collection

Primary data, involving residents’ knowledge of rainfall and temperature variability in the study area, was obtained through field surveys using in-depth interviews. Close to 30 formal interviews primarily with residents of Kibwezi West Sub-County were contacted. Secondary data was obtained from the Kenya Meteorological Department Headquarters; it involved rainfall and temperature data for the period spanning from 1993 to 2023.

**2.3 Data analysis**

The study analyzed both rainfall and temperature trends using linear regression analysis. Additionally, rainfall anomalies and variations, and rainfall concentration were also analyzed. The Coefficient of variation (*CV*) was used to analyze rainfall variations using the formulae below:

*CV* = (Standard deviation ÷ Mean) × 100.

According to the Australian Bureau of Meteorology (2010), the magnitude of *CV* is classified as follows: less than 20% as less variable, 20% to 30% as moderately variable and more than 30% as highly variable. Omotoso et al. (2023) reveal that a high variation in rainfall leads to floods or drought while consistent rainfall is essential for crop production.

To establish the temporal inhomogeneity of annual rainfall for the entire period of study, the precipitation concentration index (PCI) was used. Kalisa et al. (2020) note that a low rainfall concentration is when the PCI value is less than 10, a moderate concentration is when the value is between 10 to 20 and a high concentration is when the value is above 20. Annual rainfall concentration was computed using the following formulae.



**3. Results and discussion**

**3.1 Annual rainfall anomalies and variations**

Rainfall anomalies are crucial indicators of unusual weather patterns, shedding light on events like droughts or periods of excessive rainfall. Variations on the other hand provide insights into the shifting dynamics of rainfall over time, helping understand how it affects ecosystems, agriculture, and communities. Annual rainfall anomalies were computed by subtracting the long-term mean from annual totals and the results are presented in Figure 2.



**Figure 2:** Annual Rainfall Anomalies

The area had a long-term rainfall mean of 562.1mm with year-to-year variations (Figure 2). The year 1998 recorded the highest positive anomaly of 448.5mm. This coincided with the El Niño event that led to high rainfall in Kenya (Kotikot et al., 2024). Other years with high positive anomalies included 2006 (310.9mm) and 2018 (264.6mm). The El Niño event of 2006 led to high rainfall in the country while the long rainfall season in 2018 was the wettest in Kenya in a record 119 years according to Global Precipitation Climatology Centre (Kilavi, 2018). This contributed immensely to the overall above-normal annual rains recorded in 2018. The highest negative anomalies were recorded in 2005 (336.1mm), 2017 (228.5mm) and 2003 (214.6mm). These coincided with the La Nina-related droughts that Kenya experienced in 2003, 2005 and 2017 (Ondiko et al., 2024). The years 1997 to 1999 were characterized by above-normal annual rainfall with a mean (850mm) above the long-term mean. This too coincided with the El Niño related high rainfall that the area experienced during the same period. Below-normal rains were experienced between 2002 and 2005 with a mean of 396.3mm which was below the long-term mean. This was followed by a sharp rise in 2006 of 873mm, which coincided with the El Niño related high rainfall in Kenya. These findings support the argument by IPCC (2012) that El Niño and La Nina phenomena are a major cause of rainfall variation in East Africa, with El Niño typically bringing increased rainfall and La Niña associated with droughts.

The longest period of below-normal annual total rainfall was experienced between 2007 and 2013 with a slight rise in 2014, followed by below-normal rains between 2015 and 2017. According to Ondiko et al. (2024), this is attributed to the Indian Ocean Dipole where low Surface Sea Temperatures experienced in 2005 to 2008 and 2011 to 2016 resulted in droughts in Makueni County, negatively impacting agricultural activities in the area. The last decade (2014-2023) saw a rise in the frequency of above-normal annual rainfall (60%) compared to below-normal annual rainfall (40%). Further investigations through household surveys confirmed these findings. Mutua, a smallholder farmer in the area stated as follows:

*“…rainfall here has become increasingly unpredictable. There are times when it pours heavily and other times when we barely get a drop. But what is more concerning is that recently, the rains have become more intense often falling in a short, heavy burst which is then followed by long dry spells. This many times leaves me with little time to adjust and the drought that follows often devastates my crops…”*

These findings are consistent with those of Kimutai et al. (2022) who noted an increase in the intensity of rainfall in different parts of Kenya that has resulted in a rise in the frequency of floods and landslides. Similarly, Haret et al. (2021) reveal that between 2000 and 2050 rainfall in Kenya will become more intense and less predictable, especially in ASALs.

Climatologically, wet or dry climatic conditions occur when rainfall is above or below the long-term average (Huho, 2017). Based on this definition and with a long-term mean of 562.1mm, between 1993 and 2023 wet episodes occurred in 38.7% of the period while dry conditions were experienced in 61.3% of the same period. This reveals that episodes of drought climatic conditions were more prevalent in the Sub-County than episodes of wet climatic conditions. With 61.3% of the period experiencing drought episodes, this translated to a drought cycle of once every 2 years which negatively impacted food security.

High year-to-year rainfall variations characterize the arid and semi-arid regions due to the low and erratic rainfall they experience (Huho, 2017). A *CV* of 32% was obtained which implied that annual rainfall amounts fluctuated significantly around the long-term mean therefore being less predictable, heightening the Sub-County’s vulnerability to drought. These findings validate a report by MoALF (2016) that rainfall patterns have become increasingly erratic and unreliable thus increasing drought conditions in Makueni County over the past three decades.

**3.2 Annual rainfall concentration**

A PCI value of 17.1 was obtained indicating that annual rainfall was moderately concentrated. This suggests that rainfall was not evenly distributed throughout the year. The Sub-County was therefore moderately at risk of extreme dry or wet conditions during the year. The mean monthly rainfall distribution for the entire period of study was analyzed and results presented in Figure 3.



### Figure 3: Mean Monthly Rainfall Distribution

The Months of March, April, November and December had significant rainfall while others like June, July and August experienced relatively little rainfall (Figure 3). This was confirmed by 98% of the respondents who stated that they experienced high rains in November and December and low rains in March and April.

**3.3 Annual rainfall trend**

The trend is the general movement of a series over an extended period or the long-term change in the dependent variable over a long period. The annual rainfall trend was determined by plotting the changes and patterns of rainfall in the Sub-County over the past three decades (1993-2023). The direction of rainfall over time determined the trend. Analysis of the annual rainfall trend is presented in Figure 4.



### Figure 4: Annual Rainfall Trend

Data in Figure 4 reveals that the Sub-County experienced a generally declining rainfall trend in the last three decades (1993-2023). The linear regression equation shows a negative slope value (-0.4) indicating a downward trend. Specifically, this means that for each passing year, annual rainfall decreased by 0.4mm. These findings are consistent with those of Recha et al. (2016) and Abuya (2021) who noted a declining annual rainfall in Makueni County over the preceding five decades. Nearly all the interviewed farmers noted that there was a general decrease in rainfall amounts over the years. Kimtai, a pigeon pea farmer in the region had the following to say:

*“…I have noticed a significant change in the rainfall amount over the past few years. The rains we used to depend on are no longer as consistent. When I compare the amount of rainfall we received ten years ago to what we get now, it is clear that rainfall is becoming less and characterized by late onset and early cessation. This decreasing rainfall is making it harder for me to plan and farm effectively…”*

While acknowledging the changing rainfall patterns in Makueni County, Muia et al. (2024) noted an increase in the frequency of droughts in the County within the last two decades.

**4. Annual average temperature trend**

The annual average temperature trend in the Sub-County was analyzed and the findings are presented in Figure 5.



### Figure 5: Annual Average Temperature Trend

Annual average temperature in the Sub-County showed a generally increasing trend (Figure 5). The lowest annual average temperature was recorded in 1993 (22.7°C) and the highest in 2023 (24.0°C). The linear regression equation shows a positive slope of 0.03 signifying that the annual average temperature was increasing over time. Specifically, the annual temperature was increasing by 0.03 degrees per year.

It is noteworthy that the decade 1993-2002 was characterized by below-normal annual average temperatures while from 2003 to 2023 above-normal temperatures occurred more frequently (57.1%). The 1993-2002 decade had a mean of 23.0°C, the 2003 to 2012 decade a mean of 23.5°C and the 2013-2022 a mean of 23.6°C. This indicated a gradually rising annual average temperatures in the last three decades suggesting that the Sub-County was already experiencing climate change. These findings support reports by IPCC (2021) and WMO (2021) that globally, the last four decades have been successively warmer than any decade that preceded them since 1850. The reports further reveal that a warming trend has been observed in the African continent, with an average increase of approximately +0.30°C per decade from 1991 to 2021. According to Yvonne et al. (2020), in Kenya, the warming trend has been more rapid compared to the global average and this is attributed to increased heat waves and hot days in recent years.

**5. Conclusion**

Comparatively, annual rainfall showed a decreasing trend while annual average temperature showed an increasing trend. Temperature increased by 0.03°C annually while rainfall decreased by 0.4mm annually. This implied that the Sub-County was gradually getting hotter and drier, a clear indicator of a changing climate. In addition, rainfall was concentrated in March, April, November and December with drought climatic conditions occurring more frequently than wet conditions. Interventions such as climate-smart agricultural practices and the growing of drought-tolerant crops should be encouraged to increase farmers’ capacity to adapt and grow in the face of increased rainfall variability and more erratic weather patterns.

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**Disclaimer (Artificial intelligence)**

I hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc.) and text-to-image generators have been used during the writing or editing of this manuscript.

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