Supply and demand dynamics of *miraa* in selected production and consumption regions of Kenya

**Policy Brief**
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**Introduction**
*Khat/ miraa* is a key source of livelihood for thousands of households either through production, harvesting, processing, transportation and marketing. To consumers, *khat* is a substance that helps them relax/pass time as well as have fun. However, despite these positive attributes, *khat* has a number of adverse health and socio-economic effects. Some of the common health effects include loss of appetite, tooth decay, hallucinations, cardiac complications, insomnia, susceptibility to ulcers as well as diminished sex drive. Use of *khat* is also associated with waste of productive time, financial drain, and increased probability of using other drugs and substances of abuse. In the recent past, *khat* production and consumption has elicited much public debate in Kenya. This public discourse revolves around a number of policy relevant positions: to ban, to regulate or maintain the status quo.

The study was conducted in the year 2012. The aim was to deepen understanding on *khat* by assessing the awareness, availability and use of this substance. The study further assesses the socio-economic and health impacts of *miraa* consumption. Thus the study contributes, albeit in a small way, in informing policy with respect to the *khat* debate in Kenya.

**Methodology**
A cross-sectional study design was used where both quantitative and qualitative data were generated. This study was based on a randomly selected sample of 625 respondents drawn from five counties in the country. The counties included Meru, Marsabit, Isiolo, Kwale and Kitui. Meru was purposively selected as a key production county, while the rest were selected on the basis of being key destination markets for *khat*.

**Findings**
- That *miraa* production in the Meru region has been on the increase over the years. Production has extended to non-traditional growing zones such as Imenti as well as the marginal areas of the traditional growing zones of Igembe and Ntonyiri. A key concern with regard to *miraa* production was the uncontrolled use of chemicals in spraying *miraa* plants, a practice that if unregulated may pose a danger to the consumers.
- Across the five counties, 62% of the respondents held the view that *miraa* was easily available, while 33% of the respondents held a similar view in the case of *muguka*.
- Overall, accessibility varied with the type of *khat* (i.e. whether it is *miraa* or *muguka*) as well as by...
Further, there was a widespread perception that muguka was relatively cheaper than miraa making it more accessible in terms of cost.

- 54% of the respondents were currently using miraa, while the lifetime prevalence in the five counties was 61%.
- Current use of miraa was associated with being male, residing within the urban setting, being Muslim and residing either in Isiolo or Marsabit Counties.
- Isiolo had the highest current use of miraa at 67% followed by Marsabit at 58%.
- The mean age for initiation to miraa use was 17.6 years, with 76% of the users alluding to the role of friends in their first use of miraa.
- Although around 70% of the respondents considered khat a drug, more than 90% approve of its use.
- Data indicates that it was a substance with wide acceptability across all the counties studied. This presents a challenge in mitigating against any adverse health and socio-economic effects that may be associated with khat.
- Khat use was associated with an array of socio-economic impacts. Qualitatively, khat use was associated with lack of sleep, hallucinations, lack of appetite, stomach ulcers, teeth decay, low libido, effects on the unborn child if taken by a pregnant woman and loss of memory.
- From a socio-economic point of view, it was reported that khat use breeds idleness, crime, wastage of household resources and the problem of addiction.
- It was also established that khat use fuels the use of other drugs and substances of abuse. 72% of the current users of khat used other drugs and substances of abuse to attain their desired level of potency.
- Among the common drugs reported to be used together with khat included alcohol, various tobacco products, bhang and heroin.

**Recommendations**

The study recommends the following:

- Given the high linkage between the use of khat and other drugs of abuse, it is important for anti-alcohol and drug abuse (ADA) campaigns to focus on localized drugs and substances of abuse as a way of winning the war against ADA. This includes empowering individuals with information on the negative effects of khat use to help them make informed decisions.
- To mitigate against some of the adverse socio-economic and health impacts, it is important to enact some form of regulation for khat production, sale and consumption. Such regulation will confer benefits to the producer, enhance safety for the consumer and also mitigate against the adverse health and socio-economic effects.

For more information on the survey findings, please visit the NACADA's Website: [www.nacada.go.ke](http://www.nacada.go.ke)