

# SECURING THE FUTURE OF FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY

## AMIDST IMPACTS OF

## COVID-19 IN UGANDA AND THE EAC REGION.

**POSITION  
PAPER**

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### INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to cause a devastating impact on the already fragile livelihoods and unstable economies in the world, with Uganda inclusive. Some of these impacts include reduced agricultural productivity, weak supply chains, increased cross border trade tensions, limited employment prospects and

political uncertainty. The restrictions on movement within the country disrupted national food supply chains and affected the availability of food as well as labor markets and supplies of critical agriculture inputs. This greatly posed a challenge for food production and affect food security of the majority especially the poor and marginalized.

Access to food increasingly became difficult for the most vulnerable.

The social distancing and lockdown measures that the government put in place to combat the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, has resulted in a significant reduction of economic activities, having an impact on all people. At the household level, struggling families are increasingly seeing breadwinners lose their jobs or selling productive assets in order to survive. The restrictions on trade led to reduced imports and price increase for agricultural products, increase in

food prices.

In a matter of months, the COVID-19 has revealed the fragilities, and inequities in national food systems in Uganda which have been on cliff edges for decades millions have been living in acute food insecurity; unemployed youth have been one street snack away from hunger; employed populations – one food trade disruption away from food shortages, farmers – one single restriction in public transport away from critical farm inputs and produce markets.

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## BACKGROUND

The state of Food and nutrition security in Uganda has been deteriorating over the years. The country of plenty is increasingly housing, a hungry and malnourished population. The vulnerability of Uganda's food system has been exposed by COVID-19, climate change emergencies, and political instabilities.

In 2017, 10.9 million people were reported to be hungry, of which 1.6 million were in a crisis situation (Phase 3). The report indicated that 69% of the total population in the country was minimally food insecure (IPC Phase 1), these households still had food stocks which were expected to last for the next 2-3 months. 26% of the total population in country were facing

stressed food insecurity (IPC Phase 2), the population (having minimum adequate food consumption). 5% of the total population in the country was in a crisis stage (IPC Phase 3), the population having a widening consumption gap with deteriorating dietary diversity and high malnutrition rates. (Integrated Food Security Phased Classified Report 2017) Unemployment plays a significant role, leading to the National and Household Food Insecurity. The Right to adequate food in part is defined, as men and women alone or in their community at all times have access to adequate food or means of its procurement. Before COVID-19 the level of unemployment in Uganda, was estimated Uganda's national unemployment rate is 9.2%, while the

unemployment rate for youth aged 18-30 is 13.3% (Uganda National Household Survey 201/17), 60% of the working young person's work for less than the standard 40 hours per week, which indicates that the young wage earners and salaried workers earn a median of UGX 150,000/= per month and an average of UGX 213,000/= (Labor Market Transition of Young People in Uganda report 2015). A study conducted during the COVID-19 lockdown was established that 10% of the population in urban areas were unlikely to have work to go back to, with 41% of retail and non-agricultural businesses would be unable to operate after the lock down.

During the Lockdown 70% of the population was worried to miss a meal at least once a month, while 47% were worried to miss a meal at least five times a month. Upon the declaration of the Lockdown, only 48% had food stocks that could last them a week, and 21% never had any food stocks. In the due course, 57% of the population, circumstances pushed them, to consume one type of food. 55% reduced the size of the meal, and 39% even reduced the size of the meal given to children. The study also established that 27% of the children went hungry during the Lockdown, while 16% of the children spent a whole day without eating.

Whereas the agricultural sector in its entirety was declared essential, and farmers were encouraged to continue working there farms the study established that 40% had planted less and 24% had

planted more than expected. Those that planned less, owed it failure to access the agricultural inputs and other support from their relatives, in terms of money to hire labor and purchase other inputs. Those that planted more, owed it to increased family labor as children were out of school, and unemployed youths who would seek for agricultural labor.

The most recently IPC report 2020, launched in September 2020, FAO WFP and OPM, both established that 23% of the analyzed population (2.6 million people) is facing high levels of acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 3), 38% of the population is in a stressed Phase, and 40% is minimal Acute Food insecurity (IPC Phase 1), the population in IPC Phase 3 and 4 is employing crisis coping strategies due to increasing food consumption gap and reduced dietary diversity. The report further revealed that 6 out of 10 households sold their productive assets such as land and livestock, and turned to begging, or illegal activities to find food, and 17% of the Ugandans living in urban areas were experiencing acute food insecurity

### **Consumer Perspective, on Impact of COVID-19 on Food and Nutrition**

The pandemic has provided us a comprehensive forensic audit of our policy and regulatory frameworks. In that pandemic has not broken the institutions and systems but has showed us how weak and wanting they are and making consumers more vulnerable. Further, the pandemic has exposed that with regards to consumer protection, we are

all vulnerable as consumers. Given the challenges, the pandemic should act as a catalyst to review how food and nutrition security and consumer protection implementation is effected to protect the vulnerable consumers and promote fairness now and beyond the pandemic.

**Impact on Consumer Rights:** Many consumers are finding themselves in precarious food, health, social, economic and financial situation, where they are unable to purchase food, cater for health and service bills among others following the employment loss and loss of income, or an increase in food prices and other living essentials. The situations continued even with the lifting of the lockdown, given the sever impact on consumer and inadequacies in consumer protection enforcement there is need for a paradigm shift at all levels to meet the demands for the consumer protection and the right to adequate for in times of emergencies and beyond.

**Impact on Food Production:** the pandemic has impacted all aspects of food production irrespective of some positives in terms of cheap labor, by those that returned to the rural communities due to the lockdown restrictions. Farmers irrespective of having a affordable labor force, they faced a challenge of low farm gate prices, as majority of the market, i.e schools, hotels among others were under lockdown. Majority of the farmers were further affected by high prices on agro-inputs, more so lack of access to the agro inputs, and extension services due to

shut down of public and private transport. Additionally, consumers were as well impacted by farmers' alternative actions, as some farmers opted to process foods into food and beverages given the low food prices at farm gate. It raises a red flag to competing factors between food and raw materials, triggering worries about food and nutritional insecurity amongst vulnerable consumers both in rural and urban set-ups

**Impact on Food Markets:** The pandemic severe impacted all aspects of food markets irrespective of some positives as in low food prices as major food consumers and markets (public and private institutions and businesses) were closed due to lockdown measures. Farmers of foods and in particular poultry and poultry products off loaded them on to the market due to management and operational costs. Consumers experienced low food prices for some time, which was short lived. Consumers in precarious situations were more vulnerable as could not afford safe, quality and nutritious food products due to lack of money, loss of income and other competing priorities.

Food prices spiked given the compounding costs and challenges in the operations of food trade. This impacted consumers' food and nutrition security as they could not afford diverse healthy and nutritious foods that proved to be key in boosting consumer immunity and general health. Further, consumers were and are still

affected by poor quality and unsafe foods and services offered to them directly and indirectly. Sadly, even foods and services supplied by government to urban, semi-urban and some rural consumers were of poor quality and condemned not to be fit for human consumption. Which made consumers more insecure and vulnerable even at the hands of duty bearers. In addition, exhibited the wanting state of national institution and systems were, in effecting the obligated functions as competent authorities. Generally, the pandemic unpacked human (and food) rights abuse, negligence and unscrupulous business practices in particular with foods, feeds, health services, protection gear - masks and sanitizers targeting unaware consumers and farmers.

### **General Action**

Given the challenges and inadequacies in guaranteeing food and nutrition security plus consumer protection enforcement to

meet the demand for secure food systems and protection in times of the pandemic and beyond the government of Uganda and other EAC member States should walk the talk by investing in operationalizing all food and consumer protection related policy, legal, regulatory and institutional frameworks and strategizes. Frameworks that guarantee food and nutrition security and consumer protection in relation to quality and food safety through respective MDAs to protect consumers and promote sustainable and secure food system of Uganda (and the entire EAC) to safeguard consumers, the Uganda (and EAC) brand and economy.

Appreciating that the food systems are top most drivers of climate change and major contributors to the decline of natural biodiversity, land degradation, water extraction and pollution. Uganda and other EAC States need to transform food systems for healthier and sustainable diets that do not only nourish consumers, but also nourish the planet too.

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## **Major Food Security and Sovereignty Interventions during COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

### **1. Capacity Building and empowerment:**

Our communities of practice have been empowered with knowledge and necessary technical support to produce enough local available food both for home consumption and income

generation as a response measure to the food and income downturn caused by the Pandemic. The training are still ongoing in different communities while strictly observing the government guidelines on combating the spread of COVID-19

## 2. Home and community gardens

In light of the COVID 19 Pandemic, our main task has been to support the different communities both in rural and urban areas to setup and manage vegetable and pulse gardens for food and nutrition security during the dark times of lockdown. These Agro ecological gardens remain very instrumental in providing the necessary food stuffs from right at the door step to many families to boost their nutrition, immunity and incomes across the region.

## 3. Offer complimentary technical support to farmers and other producers, street and market food vendors

We have continued to offer the necessary technical support to farmer groups and communities in times when government led agricultural extension services were difficult to realize due to the consolidated efforts of government institutions to combat the pandemic. We

have supported extension staff reach out to farmers in need and also setup a call center in our office where farmers can call ask for technical advice and be linked to the technical person for expert advice.

## 4. Farmers markets piloted in different urban centers in collaboration with Local Authorities

Since the food security situation was worse in urban areas than in rural areas, we worked with our communities and the local government to reopen the Slow Food Earth Markets which are being piloted in three district of Uganda (Mukono, Lira and Manafwa), as well as one in Nakuru, Kenya and another one in Rombo District of Tanzania to increase access of urban population to fresh healthy food at affordable prices as well as ensure continued income to the sustainable food producers in our network. Thanks to the cooperation from the host local governments.

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## The youth, Food security Amidst

### COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Within the context of our demographics, majority of Uganda's population is below the age of 35. It is expected that this age group is in both the reproductive and productive age. Following the confirmation of the first COVID-Case in Uganda on March 21st 2020, the intervention measures mainly the lockdown affected youth engagement in food security

- i. **Labour Mobility as a factor of production:** The instant freeze of movements limited denied farmers access to the critical human resources in agriculture production.
- ii. **The lockdown affected agriculture commodity prices:** In times of lockdown, most of the consumers preferred purchasing

processed commodities – those with long shelf life to fresh agricultural commodities. In South-Western Uganda, and for the first time in urban areas, the prices Bananas – Matoke plummeted by about 70%. Most of the youth who had invested in fresh products lost market and hence losses. In a region, where youth attitude towards the agriculture sector is low, COVID-19 has exacerbated the negative attitude towards the

sector and undermines prospects for sustainable food security.

**iii. Disruptions on access to agriculture inputs:** This is not unique to the you. However, it is important to identify the fact that access agriculture was hampered by the lockdown. Supervision of production sites and farms was affected leading to losses that result from

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## The Humanitarian Sector

Currently the Humanitarian Assistance sector directly supports food security needs of an estimated 1,431,477 million refugees distributed in thirteen (13) settlements across the country<sup>1</sup> and the disaster affected areas in the Karamoja Sub-region. Apart from humanitarian Aid that is distributed to the Person of Concern, the sector contributes to livelihood interventions through externally financed projects and through locally mobilized resources. The onset of COVID-19 did not spare this important sector. The Government of Uganda id commended for the first time for having intervened by distributing food to the urban population and vulnerable groups as a measure against food insecurity. However, the intervention could cover the entire country.

**i. Breakdown in the Logistics/ Supply chain and food Pipeline:** Most of the Food and Non-food Aid Assistance distributed in the EAC is mobilized with the region and augmented by donations/ imports from the overseas. COVID-19 disrupted the entire logistics, hampering flow of supplies during the entire lockdown period. The over 40km of stuck trucks at the Eastern Boarder of Uganda and in Kenya is clear manifestation of effects on smooth transportation of goods and services across the region with a direct effect on flow humanitarian logistics.

**ii. Change in Aid Transfer modalities:** Prior to COVID-19 over 85% of the humanitarian aid beneficiaries received their assistance in kind. COVID-19 facilitated the scale up of Cash Based Assistance in order to minimize close

<sup>1</sup> UNHCR September 2020: Uganda Refugees Statistics September, 2020 <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/79423>

human to human contact. While increased flow of Cash Assistance presents another important opportunity in expansion of the local food commodity markets, government policy is slow to tapping into this opportunity in terms of harmonization of the food and agriculture commodity flow into the strong humanitarian sector zones. The leading, UN Food Agency WFP undertook ration cuts. The “Ration cuts for refugees are expected to remain in place throughout 2020 until sufficient funding is realized.

### **iii. Volatility in the employment**

**sectors:** Most of the people in Uganda mostly the youth have lost their jobs. Hunger Fighters Uganda for instance lost 31 staff out of the 93 which presents 33% of job loss due to COVID-19.

### **iv. Increased costs of delivery of**

**Assistance:** With impeded mobility of the and adjustments in the Standard Operating Procedures in the refugee settlements, the cost of delivering assistance Hs increased. The cost constraints undermine investments into livelihood and foods security interventions by Humanitarian agencies.

### **v. Dwindling of the Financing for the**

**sector:** Like in many African countries, the Humanitarian sector in Uganda highly dependent on Financing from the Donor Countries and agencies. The Pandemic affected the donor commitments

### **vi. Commodity price volatility and market distortions:**

The livelihood interventions in the Uganda’s refugee settlements interdepend on the performance in the host communities. The recent fo food and Nutrition security and

### **vii. Urban Food security situation:**

COVID-19 increased vulnerabilities to food and nutrition insecurity for urbanities. A recent survey Government of Uganda, FAO and WFP covering the period June – August 2020 indicates that Ugandans in nine urban areas were at crisis levels of food insecurity or worse because of negative impacts of the COVID-19 lockdown.<sup>2</sup> This is attributed to the loss of livelihoods in the informal sector, tourism, the travel and events industry and the education sector, reduced remittances and reduced commercial networks due to the closure of borders and market centers.

## **Recommendations**

- i. Governments in EAC put in place a comprehensive food security and livelihoods emergency strategies. The issue of the National Food Silos is critical in this regard.
- ii. The increasing financing of the agriculture sector specifically focused on value chain and value addition is important.

<sup>1</sup> FAO 2020: The comprehensive Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) <http://www.fao.org/uganda/news/detail-events/en/c/1312573/>

- iii. There is need for more concerted effort on mentorship and behavioural change activities for youth in agriculture.
- iv. The Humanitarian Assistance sector largely depends on Aid and

therefore, integrated programming and interdependence between the refugees and hosts communities is vital. National initiatives to improve food security in the refugee host communities' needs to be deliberate government policy.

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## Impact of COVID-19

## on Food Security in the EAC: A Trade Perspective.

Under Article 5 (3f) of the Protocol on the establishment of the East African Community Common Market, Partner States commit to sustainably develop and promote agriculture and ensure food security in the Community. This commitment is reiterated under Article 45 (b) where Partner States undertake to ensure food security in the Community through access to quality and sufficient food.

In a bid to curb the spread of the virus, the Presidents of the EAC Partner States undertook a number of measures that have had and continue to have far reaching implications on the social and economic outlook of the region. Indeed, as a result, key sectors have been affected, particularly travel and tourism, and trade and other services sectors; business operations hence supply chains disrupted; employment and livelihood put at risk; while consumer confidence has declined. Key to also note is that COVID-19 has contributed to the current state of food insecurity and food

vulnerability in the EAC.

As Non-State Actors, it is our perceived view that whereas Trade, especially in Agricultural products, could have averted the food insecurity related risks in the region, the current trade practices and policies among EAC Partner States were and are not supportive. Whereas COVID-19 mitigation responses required governments to provide relief items including food items, the current trade architecture (policy and practice) among Partner States worked against the possibility of using COVID-19 to increase intra-EAC trade in food to address food insecurity and vulnerability.

### **a) Existing Non-Tariff Barriers and Trade tensions impacted on access to intra-EAC trade in food products.**

The overall objective of the EAC Common Market is to widen and deepen cooperation among the partner states in the economic and social fields. This is envisaged to be realized through removal

of restrictions on the movement of goods, persons, labour, services and capital, and the rights of establishment and residence. While substantive progress has been made on removal of Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs) through establishment of respective Partner States' national and regional frameworks to eliminate NTBs,

and the passing of an NTBs Bill by the East African Legislative Assembly (EALA), assented to by the EAC Heads of State, there are a number of NTBs and trade tensions which made and still make trade in food commodities difficult, hence aggravating the food security risk of the EAC.

<b>Number of NTBs</b>	<b>Status</b>
17	Outstanding
10	Resolved (since November 2019)
2	New NTBs reported
188	NTBs cumulatively resolved since 2007

**Table 1. Report on EAC SCTIFI Meeting 2020**

During COVID-19, trade in food commodities among Partner States was hampered by notable NTBs and trade tensions including:

- The ongoing closure of Kyaanika and Gatuna Borders between Uganda and Rwanda
- Blockage and confiscation of Ugandan dairy exports to Kenya by the Kenyan Government (262,632 litres of Ugandan milk valued at \$157,106 and 54,310kg of powdered milk at \$203,630 from Uganda into Kenya was confiscated and barred from accessing the Kenyan market.

It is also critical to note that while facilitating trade in essential goods like Agricultural commodities was critical in boosting citizen's resilience and immunity, blockage on trade and food exports by Partner States has and continues to act as a hindrance to boosting people's diets to mitigate against COVID-19. Furthermore, whereas the EAC COVID-19 Response

Plan provides for undertaking an analysis of food needs of the EAC and put in place mechanisms to support farmers to keep producing them, there is no clear policy proposal of facilitating intra-EAC trade in food commodities through elimination of NTBs and other trade blockages.

**Proposal:**

EAC Partner States should put in place measures to expedite the elimination of all NTBs and address existing trade tensions so as to promote trade in food commodities which are critical in building citizen's resilience and immunity to COVID-19. In order to achieve this, implementation of the EAC COVID-19 Response Plan should be reviewed/ updated to require Partner States to commit on timelines that will lead to expediting of elimination of NTBs, especially those which are hindering intra-EAC trade in food commodities. Moreover, this will be critical for revamping intra-EAC trade, a critical step in preparing for the rolling out

trading under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

### **b) Pricing of Food Commodities and liberal trade policy**

Amidst COVID-19 mitigation measures and coupled by limited food relief items to citizens in respective EAC Partner States, prices for basic food staples rose in the region, as shoppers stocked on essentials and sellers sought profits amid the coronavirus scare. It is no secret that across the EAC, people called for governments to intervene in addressing this. However, given the liberal nature of EAC's trade where the role of EAC Partner States has been diminished, there was largely no efforts from Partner States in regulating the pricing of food commodities across the region. However, it is important to recognize the efforts by the Government of Rwanda which directly intervened and fixed prices of food commodities and punished the businessmen who did not adhere to the fixed prices.

### **Proposal**

It is important for EAC Partner States to rethink the liberalisation policy where by market forces of demand and supply are left alone to determine prices. It is therefore critical that Partner States come up with measures to set regional price ceilings for food commodities to ensure access to affordable food during COVID-19 and other subsequent pandemics.

### **c) Integrate Micro Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) into EAC Strategies aimed at promoting Intra-Regional Trade.**

The role of MSMEs in facilitating measures to address food insecurity in the EAC cannot be overstated. MSMEs contribute about 85% of employment and 25% to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the EAC<sup>3</sup>, making it the fastest growing sector in the East Africa Community (EAC), partner states. However, despite their importance in deepening the intra-EAC trade agenda, MSMEs face a number of challenges including poor quality products (that have no quality mark) and reduced lifespan of food products which acts as a hinderance in the export growth of the products manufactured by Agro-processing MSMEs and farmers in the region. Furthermore, despite the importance of the MSMEs to the economy, there isn't a tailor-made policy at EAC level focusing on the promotion of MSMEs in intra-EAC Trade. This has led to limited capacity of MSMEs to tap into the opportunities therein EAC, further constraining trade in food commodities.

### **Proposal**

The Committee on Agriculture, Tourism and Natural Resources should move a motion in EALA for an EAC policy on MSMEs, which should seek for the integration of MSMEs into EAC Trade so as to boost intra-EAC trade. The committee should also engage EAC Secretariat to amend the COVID-19 response plan to put in place measures to enhance MSMEs involvement in regional trade, especially in supply of food commodities.

<sup>3</sup><https://www.trademarka.com/news/msme-fastest-growing-sector-in-eac/>

**d) EALA's oversight in Trade negotiations like the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is critical .**

In March 2018, 44 African countries launched a common market for Africa—the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa estimates that the AfCFTA has the potential both to boost intra-African trade by 52.3 % by 2022 by eliminating import duties (90 %) and to double this trade if non-tariff barriers are also reduced (UNECA, 2018). It is anticipated that AfCFTA will among others: create a single continental market for goods and services with free movement of business persons and investments and thus pave the way for the establishment of the Continental Customs Union (CU). It is also argued that AfCFTA will expand intra African trade through better harmonization and coordination of trade liberalization and facilitation regimes and instruments across Regional Economic Communities (RECs). Whereas the first trading under the AfCFTA arrangement was scheduled for 1st July 2020, the African Union postponed the date to 1st January 2021 so as to allow Member States ample time to finalize the outstanding issues under Phase 1 Negotiations .

The preparedness of EAC Partner States to implement the AfCFTA is questionable. With commencement of Trading under

AfCFTA scheduled for 1st January 2021, the draft EAC Schedule of Tariff Concessions and the draft EAC initial Schedule of Specific Commitments on Trade in Services under the AfCFTA are yet to be finalized since some Partner States are yet to submit their revised offers harmonization/consolidation into the EAC offers.

However, engagement of EALA members in the AfCFTA negotiations is still minimal, yet they play a key oversight role in the negotiations to ensure that the final outcomes are supportive of EAC's development interests.

**Proposal**

The Committee should take a more defined role in ensuring that negotiations leading to the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) promote EAC's implementation of her commitment under the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) to increase intra-African trade in Agricultural products.

The Committee should also engage the EAC Secretariat on timely updates, especially on EAC's liberalization offers so as to ensure that any agricultural products which are sensitive to EAC are not liberalized under the AfCFTA as doing so will lead to further impoverishment of smallholder farmers.

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