

STATE OF FOOD AND NUTRITION WE NEED:

TOWARDS Vision 2040



INTRODUCTION

The government is committed to fulfilling its Constitutional obligation of ensuring food and nutrition security for all Ugandans. This has been done through committing to both national, regional and international frameworks.

At the regional and international levels, Uganda subscribes to several FNS agendas with time-bound targets. Uganda was one of the first African countries to concurrently implement the Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Program (CAADP) and the agricultural Development Strategy and Investment Plan (DSIP). Uganda is a signatory to the Malabo Declaration of June 2014 and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of September 2015. The Malabo declaration aims to reduce childhood malnutrition (under-five stunting to 10 percent and wasting to 5 percent) by 2025. The SDG2 seeks to end all forms of malnutrition by ensuring access to food for all people by 2030. These agendas outline implementation strategies ranging from poverty reduction, improving agricultural productivity, and building resilient agricultural practices.

At the national level, The Constitution of the Republic of Uganda (1995) recognizes that people have a right to food. Objective XXII on food security and nutrition requires the State to take appropriate steps to encourage people to grow and store adequate food. It also requires the State to establish

national food reserves and to promote proper nutrition through mass education and other means to build a healthy state. Vision 2040 is yet another framework that guides planning in the country with specific focus on seeing a Uganda free from all forms hunger malnutrition In addition, the government has a number of sector policies and legal frameworks that guide food and nutrition security such as the National Agriculture Policy (2013), the National Community Development Policy for Uganda (2015) and the draft Nutrition Policy (2017). Furthermore, the country is signatory to regional and international protocols and conventions, which guide food and nutrition like CAADP 2014, EAC and SDGs 2015.

That notwithstanding, hunger and malnutrition remain a prominent national challenge with a big proportion of the population not being able to access adequate food. The demand for food in the country has outstripped the supply because of the rapid population growth rate at 3 percent per annum outpacing food production, at 2 percent for over a decade. Thus, As of January 2017, an estimated 10.9 million people in Uganda were experiencing acute food insecurity, of which 1.6 million were in crisis reflecting a high magnitude of hunger. In addition, 40% of the population was not able to meet the required daily dietary intake of 2200-Kilo calories and 16% of the households were chronically undernourished.

Food Security Situation

IN UGANDA

The 2019 State of Food Security (SOFI) report notes that more than 820 million people in the world are hungry and this could underscore the immense challenge of achieving the Zero Hunger target by 2030. It has been evidenced that hunger is on the rise in almost all sub regions of Africa, where the prevalence of undernourishment has reached levels of 22.8 percent in sub-Saharan Africa. A broader look at the extent of food insecurity, beyond hunger, shows that 17.2 percent of the world population, or 1.3 billion people, have experienced food insecurity at moderate levels. This means that they do not have regular access to nutritious and sufficient food, even if they are not necessarily suffering from hunger, they are at greater risk of various forms of malnutrition and poor health (FAO, 2019).

After decades of steady decline, the trend in world hunger has been measured by the prevalence of Undernourishment. In Eastern Africa particularly, 30.8% of people are undernourished with approximately 271.7 million people experiencing some form of food insecurity (FAO, 2019). Although Uganda is predominantly an agricultural economy, the country still remains food insecure, and consequently has experienced persistent instances of hunger. A country is said to be food secure when people have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. Essentially, food security encompasses four

dimensions: food availability; economic and physical access to food; food utilization and stability over time (FAO 1996). The major underlying factors to food insecurity are: low agricultural productivity (erratic weather patterns, pests and disease epidemics, limited land tenure system, prominence of smallholder farming thus making it expensive to service, limited access to extension services); high post-harvest losses; food safety; low household incomes; unregulated cross border trade in food products; and lack of household and national food reserves. The lack of food redistribution mechanisms also fails to leverage food surplus in one region to cater for scarcity in another region.

Over 68% of Uganda's population is engaged in subsistence agriculture production. The country has good soils, bi-modal climate and abundant water sources that can be harnessed for increased agricultural production.

The Government of Uganda has implemented various programmes towards increasing production, productivity, value addition and marketing. Some of these include; the Plan for Modernization of Agriculture (PMA), Development Strategy and Investment Plan 2011-2015 and Agricultural Sector Strategic Plan 2015/16 – 2019/20 all geared at improving nutrition and food security. However, production remains low requiring reprogramming for increased efficiency.

Nutrition Security Situation

Nutrition security describes the access by all people at all times to safe, adequate and utilization and absorption of nutrients in food in order to be able to live a healthy and a productive life. Therefore, nutrition security implies consumption of the right foods that contain the desired nutrients in the right amounts for the good growth and functioning of the body. It involves consuming a combination of adequate quantity and quality of foods prepared in a way that conserves nutrients. The health status of an individual is a prerequisite to ensure maximum absorption and utilization of the nutrients from the food. According to the Cost of Hunger in Uganda report, under nutrition is not only a social, but also an economic issue, as countries are losing significant sums of money as a result of current and past child undernutrition (WFP, 2009). The same report notes that there's a strong link between micronutrient deficiencies and stunting. It further suggest that promotion of the consumption of fortified complementary food especially in populations most affected could help curb the issue of micronutrient deficiencies and stunting hence improving the nutrition security situation among populations. Despite the availability of various foods rich in nutrients, situations of malnutrition occur due to inadequate intake, uptake and, or utilization of nutrients composed in the

food. This may be as a consequence of poor processing of food, poor food handling and preparation methods and/or impaired absorption capacity of the body.

Overall, the prevalence of undernourishment (reflecting the share of the population with insufficient caloric intake below 2,200 kcal) remains high with nearly 40% of individuals in Uganda being classified as undernourished, and 16 percent of the households are chronically undernourished with only 4 percent of the households being food secure for the last five years (2009/10-2015/2016). This implies that Ugandans are unable to consume the minimum Required Dietary Intake (RDI) for light physical activity which is 2,200 kcal and are consuming only an average of 1,860 Kcal per day.

The intake is lower in the rural areas with an average of 1,814 in 2009/10 to 1,841 in 2015/16 as compared to the urban areas standing at 1,956 kcal in 2009/10 to 2,030 kcal in 2015/16. In addition, the dietary diversity scores remain below the standard average of 9.2¹ although some improvements have been registered. Important to note is that households in the Northern and Eastern regions which are more food insecure have higher food diversification as compared to the Central and Western which are more food secure,

¹ Based on the USAID framework for HDDS for measurement of household food access, the 'average HDDS in the richest 33 percent of households can serve as a guide for setting the target level of HDDS' (Swindale and Bilinsky, 2006); from the UNPS, the average HDDS for this group was estimated at 9.2.

reflecting cultural and nutrition knowledge gaps, and agro ecological food production zones. This situation is worrying since it implies that the rural areas which are the food producers are increasingly becoming food insecure and more hunger stricken, meaning that they are selling off most of the food produced. This is a reversing trend since in the earlier period (2002/3-2005/6), individual's resident in urban areas had a higher prevalence of food insecurity and hunger than their rural counterparts (Ssewanyana and Kasirye, 2010).

There are also regional variations, with the northern being the lowest and the western the highest. Specifically, there is a drastic decline in caloric intake per person per day in the eastern region, from 1,913 kcal in 2009/10 to 1,692 kcal in 2015/16, and caloric deficiency increasing from 33.2% in 2009/10 to 45.8% in 2015/16 which is attributed to unguided commercialization of agriculture in the region, with increased focus on cash crops at the cost of food production. The case of commercial production of sugarcane in Busoga is highlighted as a threat to land availability for food crops.

The richest 20 percent of the population is able to meet the required dietary intake while the poorest 20 percent have the highest levels of undernourishment. Overall, there is an urgent need to focus on the food intake of the poorest households if Uganda is to meet the required targets for ensuring

access to food to all Ugandans all year round.

The nutritional quality of the foods consumed in the country is low. The most consumed food stuff in Uganda are staples (cereals, roots, tubers and matooke), which are normally relatively cheap foods but are generally low in nutritional density due to low protein and micronutrient deficiencies except beans and ground nuts. The contribution of staples to caloric intake remained high at over 60 percent of the daily caloric intake. Therefore, both dietary quantity and quality remain key challenges in ensuring that all Ugandans are hunger free and nutrition secure. Over 64% of Ugandans cannot afford the desired 3 meals per day (UBOS, 2016).

Undernutrition resulting from hunger is still a big challenge in Uganda. It majorly affects children culminating into high rates of stunting, underweight, wasting, and hence making them vulnerable to diseases and resulting into high child mortality rates². While stunting decreased from 32 percent in 2009/10 to 29 percent in 2016, underweight from 22% to 11%, and wasting from 7% to 4% (UDHS, 2016), the reduction is slow. Currently, about 1.8 million children aged less than 5 years are stunted. At this pace, by 2030, approximately 11 percent of the population under five-years will be stunted,³ which will still be high.

² (infant mortality is 43%, under 5 mortality is 64% UDHS, 2016)

³ Assuming that all factors remain constant.

There are also large geographical variations in stunting rates, with children in rural areas being more stunted as compared to urban children.⁴The western region has the highest stunting rates (Table 4). While western Uganda is more food secure, they have limited dietary diversity. This is attributed to culture, knowledge gaps and production patterns across agro-ecological zones.

The deteriorating food insecurity situation in the country has been greatly caused by natural and policy related factors which include;

Increased cash crop production among smallholder farmers

Over 80% of Ugandan farmers are smallholder farmers occupying acreage of about 1-3 acres of land for farming (NPA, 2013), while the large scale farmers mainly pursue plantation agriculture mainly in cash crops and livestock. Uganda's major agricultural commodities include sugarcane, coffee, tea, cassava, maize, beans, ground nuts, rice, and bananas. Coffee and tea are traditional cash crops grown mainly for export, while maize, beans, groundnuts, and rice are the primary agricultural commodities traded locally and within the EAC and COMESA region. However, in some regions of the country, smallholder farmers are venturing into cash crop production. For instance in the Eastern region, smallholder farmers opt to use their land to grow sugarcane for income generation at the

expense of food security.

Informal across border trade

On the other hand, Uganda is the largest informal supplier of grains in the East Africa region, contributing to more than 70 percent of regional consumption, and it is recognized that the informal grain trade between Uganda and its neighbors is around five times higher than that of the formal grain trade. This therefore demonstrates the dominance of informal trade in the region and there is need to formalize it (GoU, 2015). This is because it has affected the Uganda's Food security and Nutrition situation. This strategy proposes that trade regulations across borders should be strengthened to ensure that food security commodities are not sold off from farmers through informal trade.

Untapped potential for irrigation

Despite the potential of irrigation to contribute to food security being well understood, its use is minimal. The total area equipped for irrigation in Uganda is of 11,137 hectares, which represents only 0.1 percent of the country's total arable land, with the crops under irrigation mainly being rice and sugarcane (FAO, 2012).⁵ The land under irrigation by crop type is: for rice, 79 percent; sugarcane, 12 percent; maize, 4 percent; for vegetables, 5 percent; (MWE, 2010). The low adoption and usage of irrigation technologies in Uganda is

⁴The rural-urban gap in the stunting rate narrowed from approximately 14 percent in 2009/10 to approximately 9 percent in 2015/16 partly explained by the consistent reduction in stunting rates in rural areas.

⁵ MoWE (2010). A National Irrigation Mater Plan for Uganda, 2010-2035. Republic of Uganda, Kampala.

partly attributed to: limited promotion of simple appropriate irrigation technologies, the high cost of investment in appropriate irrigation technologies; inefficient use of existing irrigation infrastructure; insufficient, uncoordinated, policy, legal and institutional mechanisms for irrigation between MWE and MAAIF. Other contributors to poor irrigation coverage are small land holdings, and limited technical capacity to manage irrigation facilities, particularly at lower levels (districts and farmers themselves), exacerbated by unclear land ownership arrangements and weak tenure systems.

Low access to extension systems

There has been progress in provision and delivery of extension services however, there are several unmet farmers' demands for extension services that need to be affectively addressed. According to the Ministerial Policy Statement FY 2018/19, MAAIF has recruited 3,854 (77%) extension workers at district and sub-county levels out of the initial target of 5,000 extension workers. As a result, the current ratio of extension worker to farmer is 1: 1,800 whereas the recommended is 1:500 (the approved structure is 13 officers at district level and 3 extension staff at sub-county level). The 5,000 extension staff were for 116 districts in FY2015/16, but districts have since increased to 128. This is an addition of 12 districts and 94 sub-counties that has led to inadequate staffing levels both at the district and sub-counties (BMAU, 2019).

Limiting land tenure system

The challenges regarding land tenure and inadequate access to land can be presented from different perspectives. The constraints related to the tenure system, such as insecurity of land tenure, unequal access to land, lack of mechanism to transfer rights and consolidate plots, have resulted in under-developed agriculture, high landlessness, and food insecurity and degraded natural resources in most parts of the country. Furthermore, the available land in most parts of the country is overly subdivided into small uneconomic units, resulting in fragmented production systems and low productivity. Most farmers operate between 1 – 3 acres and the continuous cultivation of these fields has led to a fall in production levels. In addition to this very low absolute level of land holdings, the distribution of available land is highly inequitable (NPA, 2013).

Low household incomes especially in rural areas

The low household incomes impact on food security and exacerbate hunger in both rural and urban households with greater impact in rural low-income households. The lower the household income, the higher the proportion of household expenditure on food, implying higher vulnerability to food insecurity. The average share of food in total household expenditures was in the range of 55 percent to 61 percent over the 2009/10-2013/14 period, implying medium vulnerability to food insecurity.

Low productivity

Although a majority of Ugandans are employed in agriculture, agricultural production remains low across regions. Low productivity has been blamed on erratic weather patterns characterized by severe and frequent droughts, floods; low access to extension services; low adoption of agricultural-enhancing technologies (such as fertilizers, improved seeds and breeds, agronomic and animal husbandry practices, and irrigation); poor quality inputs on the market; prevalence of pests and disease epidemics; limited access to agricultural financing; insecure land tenure systems; inefficient output and a limited market. In addition, low productivity is coupled with food losses and wastage along the value chain. According to (GoU, 2015).

This has seen the proportion of food secure population has declined from 83% in July 2016 to 69% in January 2017. The report further classifies 26% of the total population of Uganda is facing “stressed food insecurity”, that is they have minimal adequate food consumption, but are unable to afford some essential nonfood expenditures without engaging in irreversible coping strategies.

On the other hand high malnutrition in Uganda is a result of several interacting causes ranging from policy issues to immediate household conditions to underlying community and cultural situations. The immediate causes of malnutrition in Uganda are two-fold: inadequate dietary intake resulting from

sub-optimal maternal and infant feeding practices and the high disease burden resulting from malaria, diarrheal disease, and acute respiratory infections. There are three broad underlying causes of inadequate dietary intake and the high disease burden: Household food insecurity (mainly related to poor access to the range of foods needed for a diversified diet). An added element of this is that the foods that households frequently consume are relatively deficient in micronutrients. Seasonality in food production, variable food prices, and seasonal earning patterns exacerbate the instability and the poor quality of the diet the household consumes through the year. Inadequate maternal and childcare and care-related constraints lead to both inadequate dietary intake and a high disease burden in young children. These constraints include the heavy workload that women as primary caregivers in the household must shoulder every day. Women do both farm and household chores and might engage in small business activities, while also being responsible for the continual care of the children and other dependents within the household.

Frequent births limit a woman’s ability to properly care for her infant and other young children, while also regaining her own health. In addition, social dislocation in many households and communities in Uganda has led to changes in traditional gender roles and increased family breakups. These changes tend to worsen the quality of the nutrition and health care women and young children receive.

Way Forward

There is need to focus attention on helping small holder farmers secure land rights through the right appropriate channels and processes, as lack of ownership of land remains one of the biggest challenge and weakness leading to land eviction resulting into food insecurity.

Implementation of existing policies and strategies that promote agriculture, food and nutrition security aimed at addressing the country's food and nutrition security needs; the Uganda Nutrition Action Plan, the Agricultural Sector Strategic Plan, Agricultural Strategy and Investment Plan, the National Nutrition Planning Guideline for Uganda.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been an eye open to having food banks and food reserves in the country. Restoration of national food reserves through strategic re-nationalization of national silos, expediting restoration of cooperative societies, which will provide buffer stock of food in cases of emergencies and pandemics.

Strengthening agricultural extension services to address the needs of the small holder farmers, regulating the private sector in the supply of agricultural inputs. This should be part of the broad campaign to create awareness, empower communities and build capacity in soil management, pest and disease prevention and management, looking forward to minimizing post-harvest losses.

Government needs support and promote local food production and short supply chains, across all value chains both in the rural and urban farm production. For the case of urban food production, promotion of local production can be done through urban and peri-urban agriculture. There is also need for the establishment/improvement of traditional markets but also focusing on promoting e-commerce to improve producer-consumer linkages, linking food to the final consumer.

Facilitating access to food especially for the most vulnerable through social protection programmes complemented by efficient, safe and innovative food distribution. During the COVID-19 pandemic the government activated food distribution modalities relying on various local food producers and associations. For constant food supply and ensuring communities are food secure, diversifying the retail distribution systems should be at the center of the food distribution strategies. Traditional markets can be considered key for reaching out to vulnerable people and promoting healthy and culturally appropriate food.

Promote sectorial, vertical and horizontal coordination for effective planning and implementation of strategies, for effective food security in the Country. Agriculture, trade, health, and local government, require to integrate and streamline their sector plans and strategies to promote food

security in the country. The establishment of multi-stakeholder and multi-scalar (from local to national) food governance mechanisms should be also considered as priority, especially recognizing that various local actors could become essential driving force in ensuring food availability especially

during in cases of emergencies. The informal economy plays a pivotal role in food distribution should be netter analyzed and integrated into policy, planning and action related to food systems preparedness and resilience.



Conclusion

Dietary patterns according to levels of food insecurity indicate that dietary quality worsens with increasing security of Food Insecurity, and the ways in which moderately food insecure people modify their diets vary according to the income levels in the country. Food is not just a basic need, rather a fundamental human right. In our

country with high potential of agricultural production, the government strategies and systems have remained to some extent a failure in the realization of Zero Hunger in the country. Its Governments full obligation to ensure Ugandans realize their human right to Food, and are food security.



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