

CIVIL SOCIETY PRESSER

THE ESCALATING FOOD INSECURITY AND MALNUTRITION IN KARAMOJA SUB REGION AND ACROSS THE COUNTRY

THE WORSE IS YET TO COME!!!

JULY, 2022



**For immediate release: Tuesday,
19th July 2022, 10:00 am, Kampala**

We the civil society organizations (CSOs) and concerned individuals working to promote the Right to Adequate Food, trade justice, agriculture, environmental justice, children's rights, farmers' rights, fiscal and human rights related issues, wish to register our fears in view of the escalating food insecurity and malnutrition in Karamoja Sub -Region and across the entire country. The State of Play of Land in the Uganda.

Our concerns are based on the persistent food insecurity and malnutrition problems in Karamoja Sub Region and the fact that the region has the highest levels of deprivations and poverty in Northern Uganda estimated at 66%. 40% of the entire population in Karamoja have no food, 20% have stocks enough to last a month, while 3% will be able to feed themselves for the next 90 days¹.

The latest data from the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) indicates that all nine districts in the Karamoja region

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<https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/famine-consumes-karamoja-3880508>

are classified in IPC Phase 3 (Crisis). About 41 percent of the population or 518,000 people found themselves facing high levels of acute food insecurity between March and July 2022.

Hunger is a global phenomenon of our time. The number of people affected by hunger globally rose to as many as 828 million in 2021, an increase of about 46 million since 2020 and 150 million since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. The latest State of Food Security and Nutrition report shows the world is moving backwards in efforts to eliminate hunger and malnutrition. Following the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic, the number of hungry people in the world grew by about 150 million.

In Africa, 100 million people were estimated to have faced catastrophic levels of food insecurity in 2021. It is expected that this situation worsened due to the socio-economic impacts of Covid-19 (FAO, 2021). Hunger in the Eastern Africa Region is on the rise, with an estimated 81.6 million food insecure people in April 2022.

In Uganda, hunger and malnutrition have persisted over the years. In 2017, about 10.9 million people experienced acute food insecurity while 1.6 million were classified in a crisis situation (IPC, 2017).

In 2020, 10 million people experienced some level of food insecurity of which 2.6 million were in acute state, while 56% of these people were in urban areas. 17% of the population in urban areas was in acute food insecurity. It is estimated that Covid-19 trapped about 2 million more people into hunger. (FAO U. W., 2020).

Invisible hunger (malnutrition) has consistently remained high. Today, 25% of children under 5 of which 30% are rural and 24% are urban are stunted. These are added to the 54% of all adults who suffered stunting while they were young. In addition, 7.8% are under-weight, 44% are anaemic while 3.1% are overweight.

Below are the drivers of food insecurity and malnutrition in the country;

1. Food Production Predominantly in Hands of Family Farmers:

Aware and cognizant that Uganda is an agrarian country, where the sector engages about 67% of the population is dominated by small holder family farmers who produce about 80% of the total food consumed in the country and exported. These family farmers

and their production system are dependent on natural resources, rain-fed agriculture and family labor. Given the growing population, harsh weather conditions, scramble for land plus other competing demands and nonfunctioning market systems, the family farmers can hardly competitively emerge to produce the sufficient quality and quantities of the food required locally, nationally, regionally, continentally and globally.

2. Food Loss and Waste:

Concerned, that while many people are sleeping hungry, a lot of food is lost and wasted before and after reaching the mouth of consumers. It is estimated that 30% - 50% of the annual agricultural produce: grain, fresh fruits and vegetables harvest (in terms of weight) is lost (EPRC, 2019). Furthermore, 40% of fruit and vegetable goes to waste during supply chain (Uganda, 2020) and unestimated volumes at household levels.

3. Poor Quality Culture in the Agri-Food System:

Aware that in Uganda, hunger is not about the quantity of food that is available and accessible by the people but also the quality and safety of this food. In 2019, flags were raised after five people died and over 300 fell sick after eating super cereals that were distributed in Karamoja. In effect, World Food Program suspended the distribution of this fortified blended food (WFP, 2019). In 2020, during the Covid-19 lock down, Uganda National Bureau of Standards revealed that

43% of the food that had been mobilized for distribution to the vulnerable consumers was not fit for human consumption due to high level contamination of aflatoxins and other hazards. Challenging the quality of Uganda's food system and put in the lime light. In 2021, Kenya stopped the importation of maize from Uganda citing quality issues and specifically presence of high levels of aflatoxins. This justifies that if food is not safe, then it is not food for human or feed for food producing animals.

4. Limited Investment in addressing Climate Change:

Aware that climate change is real and affecting humanity in all aspects including the farming communities, that experience a double burden of water either too much (floods) or too less (drought). Uganda is yet to leverage on the available opportunities to undertake strategic and minimum investments in water for agricultural production. There is limited funding to Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industries and Fisheries (MAAIF) Climate Smart Agriculture to ensure its implementation at community level. Climate change effects (e.g. drought) are a reality, the impacts have led to increasing food insecurity and poverty. Therefore, there is need to support initiatives that build resilience of agricultural systems for enhanced incomes, food and nutrition security.

5. Non-Functioning Food Markets:

Cognizant of the role of trade in stabilizing food

supplies in terms of input and output distribution from areas of supply to areas of need. Food trade was not spared while the country adopted the trade liberalization. Food and means of its production were commoditized and left to the laws of the market. While food is on high demand in one part of the country causing price hikes, it is abundant in other parts of the country causing price floors.

The porous borders and the unregulated trade have seen family farmers selling food stuffs pre-maturely at weeding or flowering stage trapping such households in deep poverty, food and income insecurity. The unregulated exportation of food has in some cases created scarcity of vital foods such as beans and fish among others. Between May 2019 and May 2020, Uganda reported a percentage increase of beans at 123.2% higher than any other export commodity reported. This partially explains the scarcity of beans during the 2020 lockdown.

Similarly, Uganda is growing into a food importer suppressing local production and livelihoods of the actors in the out competed commodity chains. The importation of fruit juices from Egypt, poultry products and vegetables from South Africa and vegetable oils among others are such examples. Uganda as a Low-income economy cannot rely on food imports as the disposable incomes of its people are still very low.

6. Low Productivity in Agriculture:

While the demand for food and food products increases due to population growth, industrialization and trade, the productivity of our agri-food system is so low. This is attributed to the limited investment in soil quality, technology, and high costs of production. It is estimated that 46% of Uganda's soils are degraded and 10% is very degraded. Access to good quality inputs is a challenge to both family farmers and large-scale food producers.

Further the Changes in land use patterns resulting into conversion of prime agricultural land for development has affected productivity. The drive to achieve Uganda's socio-economic transformation has resulted into conversion of prime agricultural land which is central to livelihood of Ugandans. The food insecurity vagaries that have arisen from this conversion prevails to date. The massive acquisition for lands for oil plantation and sugarcane production has led to reduction in land cover for food crop production hence this has resulted food insecurity in regions in the country affected by these largescale land acquisitions.

7. Absence of National Strategic Food Reserves:

Concerned that, Uganda has no strategic food reserves despite the constitutional obligation and commitment to establish national food reserves as a measure of addressing food insecurity (GOU, 1995). Contrary to this Constitutional obligation, the government privatized the existing food reserves and are

currently used as ware houses by private operators. The country is missing out on the great opportunities that national food reserves present to the social, economic and political stability of the country. It further robs of government the confidence in the quantities, quality and timely response to cases of acute food scarcity.

The food reserves balances production and consumption of the critical foods of minimum requirement in the country.

8. Urbanization and the Demand for Food and Basic Amenities:

Aware that Uganda is urbanizing at a rate 5.41% per annum (Index Mundi, 2021), the country has currently declared 11 cities, 31 municipalities, 89 municipal divisions and 580 town councils (GOU, www.molg.go.ug). All these cities, municipalities and town councils have urban and rural segments in their territories; there land governance has expanded into rural areas which were predominantly food production areas. The food choices in urban areas and the demand for food has a bearing on food security and nutrition of both the rural and the urban. The key question that must be urgently answered as the country is first urbanizing is what (quantity and quality) are the people in the urban areas going to eat?

9. Failure to Leverage on the Demographic Dividend to Transform the Agri-Food System:

Uganda is predominantly a country of young people but the average age of a farmer is 50 years and these are majorly women that supply over 70% of the total labour force in the agri-food system. It is estimated that 48.47% of Uganda's population is between the age of 0-14 years and 21.16% are aged between 15-24 years (GOU, Uganda Population 2022 (Demographics, Maps, Graphs), 2022). Therefore 77% of Uganda's population is below the age of 30. This young population is highly unemployed and under employed. The country requires to create more than 600,000 jobs per year to optimize this demographics dividend (Gou, Population Growth in Uganda: Challenges and Opportunities, 2021). The agri-food system holds inherent opportunities for this young population. However, the country has not valued the food produced and the entire agri-food system to enable it make economic sense, attract investments and technology. The young people are in an age group that requires optimum utilization of all food groups and consumption of considerable amounts of food. Their inability to have means of procuring the food and their need to consume food as a basic need of life mounts a burden to an already fragile agri-food system.

10. Persistent Hunger among School Going Children:

Whereas, the proposed Uganda School Health Policy, 2018-2023 recommends a minimum school health package that includes health promotion and education, the prevention of diseases, safe water and sanitation provision,

a healthy and safe school environment and other health/nutrition interventions, we note that this policy remains in draft format, it is estimated that 4 out of 10 of children aged 3-5 years attend early child education; 8 out of 10 of children aged 6 to 12 years attend primary school and 1 in 4 children attend secondary school (UNICEF, 2020). It is unfortunate however, that only 46.3% of school-going children aged between 6-12 years in day schools in Uganda take a meal at school. The number is higher in urban areas at 60.1% compared to 41% in rural areas during the year 2019/2020 (UBOS, 2020). Hunger in schools has been a contested subject over the years that have never been attended too as an issue of National Importance. The absence of meals among this age group does not only affect the quality of their education and health but it is wasting over 50% of the quality of the future generation.

11. Poor Policy, Legal and Institutional Architecture for Food and Nutrition:

Whereas the country has multiple policies, legal instruments and institutions touching on food and nutrition. There is no mandated institution for ensuring national and household food and nutritional security. Although the country adopted a food system and multispectral/multi-stakeholder approach to ending hunger and malnutrition, the absence of a streamlined policy, legal and institutional architecture has affected coordination, planning, investment, service delivery and accountability.

12. Low Investments in Agriculture and Food Security:

While people have been reportedly dying of hunger in Karamoja and elsewhere, hunger is spreading across the country, grave violations and abuses have been committed to peoples' right to adequate food. The jurisprudence is complex to give justice to the victims and hold specific duty bearers accountable. Furthermore, while partners and individuals offer massive material and financial support to the Government of Uganda in cases of a crisis, such as during the COVID-19 lock down and currently in the case of Karamoja, there has been no systematic leadership provided to translate this support into transformative interventions and optimize their use to end hunger and malnutrition in the short, medium and long term. The role food plays in the social, economic and political stability, the recent setbacks indicate that the prevailing architecture no longer delivers increasing marginal returns in reducing hunger, food security and malnutrition in all its forms (FAO I. U., 7TH 07 2022).

While enabling environment was identified as a critical area in addressing malnutrition under the Uganda Nutrition Action Plan II, this area attracted minimal resources while costing this plan compared to the areas of nutrition specific and nutrition sensitive, recent evaluation reports on financing nutrition in Uganda have revealed that this area has not attracted resources from both state and non-state actors.

While Uganda as a member state of the African Union committed to allocate at least 10% of her budget to agriculture in 2003 (Maputo) and renewed her commitment for the same in 2014(Malabo), the allocation to the sector for the last 18 years has been below 4%. In the Financial Year 2018/19, government recognized that food insecurity was one of the leading barriers to achieving the anticipated economic growth and instructed all Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) to plan for Food and nutrition interventions; there has been no mechanism of tracking performance of this instruction until today. Food security and nutrition have severely been referred to in the various planning frameworks including National Development Plan (NDP) III and currently the Parish Development Model. However, there is no specific pronouncement and or action-oriented declaration in all these instruments including the national budgets on how the country is planning to feed the population in a given period of time. This has resulted in food insecurity situations. For instance, in 2017 when 25% of the country's population faced food shortage. (GOU, National Food Security Assessment January 2017 - Uganda, 2017), during the Covid-19 lockdown in 2020 and currently about Karamoja being treated as moments of disaster that require supplementary budgets and solicitation of support from the public.

Relatedly, inadequate financing towards agriculture extension services has exacerbated the food insecurity situation in the country; aware that the Agriculture Extension Services Strategy is under review by Ministry of Agriculture, Animals, Fisheries and Industries, we note that the 2015 Extension Strategy was inadequately funded as less than 50% of the required UGX 887 billion was provided during the 5-year period. Additionally, according to the Ministerial Policy Statements for the financial year 2022/23, only 46 districts out of the 146 districts had recruited agricultural irrigation engineers. Further, the country has only 3790 extension workers and the farmer extension ratio is 1:1800, for example, only 30% (Gou, Local Government Management of Service Delivery Performance Assessment Report, 2021) of assessed Local Governments recruited Lower Local Government Extension workers where wage was provided in 2021. This implies that there is limited technical backstopping available to the food system to guarantee improved quantity, quality and increased production of food.

We therefore recommend the following proposals in the immediate, medium and long term;

RESPONSE TO ACUTE FOOD INSECURITY:

- ✚ Government should adopt an integrated response mechanism that provides psychosocial support, therapeutic foods to

the acute malnourished victims and nutritious food rations. Relevant MDAs such as Ministry of Health, Gender, Labour and Social Development should be active participants in these mechanisms.

- ✚ Government of Uganda and development partners including civil society should support efforts towards strengthening community-based adaptation mechanisms for building resilience under climate change short and long.

- ✚ **Promote food sovereignty in Karamoja and the rest of the country:** According to the Zoning, the country was mapped according to production and ecological systems rooted in the cultures and indigenous food systems. These should be upheld to let the people define their food system and feed themselves to live a life with dignity. For instance, Karamoja sub-region was predominantly a livestock production region whose communities over years of experience and practice evolved around sustainable livestock production systems adaptable to the variable climate regimes.

- ✚ **Rethinking Agricultural and Food Trade Policies:** There is urgent need to rethink the trade policy and practices in Uganda. These include the liberalization of the agricultural input system, the privatization of food trade including the strategic food reserves, the importation of cheaper food products such as fruit juices and vegetable

products and the weak food distribution channels. These will provide safety nets to shocks of food insecurity.

✚ **Exploit the opportunities created by negotiated markets to drive production and increase incomes:**

Uganda has negotiated various markets at Bilateral and Multilateral levels such as the EAC Common Market, EAC-SADC-COMESA Tripartite, the AfCFTA, the EU Everything but Arms, among others. However, more attention is required to address supply side constraints related to quantity and quality of produce.

✚ **Land-based investments should prioritize food security:**

While investments are a priority to national economic development, these investments should prioritize food security and food safety and ensure safety of technology and inputs used in these investments to keep the food system safe. Technologies such as mercury should be prohibited in mining as they lead to bio-accumulation along the food chain.

✚ **Streamline the Food and Nutrition Governance:**

Government needs to take policy, legal and institutional reforms to streamline the governance architecture for food and nutrition. These governance reforms are required to foster planning, coordinate investments, manage data systems and coordinate actors.

✚ **Re-establish the national strategic food reserves:**

This is a constitutional obligation at national and regional level and they are required to stabilize economic inflation caused by food prices, provide incentives to farmers and a safe source for food in crisis situations.

✚ **Monitor and demand for accountability for funds and products in response to an acute food insecurity situation:**

Civil Society and other partners should pay critical attention to the quantity and quality of the foods being distributed to establish whether such foods are fit for human consumption, meet the minimum acceptable diets and are of sufficient quantities. Critical attention should also be paid to the value for money to ensure proper accountability.

✚ **We need efficient data systems on food and nutrition in the country.**

This system provides prior information on how much food we have in the country and how many people are in dire need of food.

In Conclusion, priority should be given to mitigating hunger situations because it's cheaper to mitigate hunger situations than address hunger crisis. Uganda and indeed Karamoja has all its takes to feed itself.



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