

WORLD FOOD DAY 2026 PRESS STATEMENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

UGANDA CANNOT INNOVATE ON AN EMPTY STOMACH: HUNGER, DROUGHT AND FUEL COSTS ARE PUSHING FOOD OUT OF REACH

Statement by the Civil Society Organizations under the Food Rights Alliance (FRA) membership on World Food Day 2026, under the theme “Innovate Today, Nourish Tomorrow”

KAMPALA, 16 October 2026 – Uganda today joins the world to commemorate World Food Day under the theme “*Innovate Today, Nourish Tomorrow*”, a call to place innovation at the centre of efforts to secure food and nutrition, raise productivity and farmers’ incomes, and build resilience to climate change. It is a day of reckoning. Harvests have failed in many parts of the country, children are surviving without the nutrients they need to grow, safe food has become a privilege, and the price of a basic meal is climbing out of reach of ordinary households.

Three pressures are now bearing down on the same households at the same time. A strong El Niño, which the World Meteorological Organization expects to persist through February 2027, has followed a dry spell that began in late April and damaged crops, pasture and water sources. Agriculture supports the majority of Ugandan livelihoods, food supply, jobs and export earnings. When the harvest fails and the cost of moving food climbs together, the damage reaches far beyond the farm. It reaches the kitchen, the classroom, the clinic and the army barracks. Food has become expensive for households whose food security is dependent on the market. And a fuel and currency shock is raising the cost of moving every sack of food from farm to market. This World Food Day, Food Rights Alliance and her member organizations including Babuka Development Ministries Uganda (Bademu), Ripple Effect Uganda, Hunger-Free World-Uganda, Advocacy Coalition for Sustainable Agriculture (ACSA), Alpha Action for Social and Economic Development -AASED, Centre For Ecological Governance and Gender and Consumer Education Trust (CONSENT) Initiatives call for urgent, coordinated action so that Uganda responds before the next shock arrives, not after it.

The State of the Nation: Five Burdens of Hunger

Hunger in Uganda is no longer a single problem. It shows up in five connected burdens, and each one demands a national response.

Hunger and failure to access food. The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) estimates that about 3.6 million people, or 17% of the population analysed, are in Crisis or worse (IPC Phase 3 or above) between July 2026 and January 2027, a 6% increase from 2025. In Karamoja, about 673,000 people are in that condition, the highest number recorded since 2018 and 200,000 more than in March 2026. Crop losses of at least 50% to 70% had been reported in most areas of the region by June. The worst is still ahead. During the lean

season from February to June 2027, an estimated 4.4 million people, or 21% of those analyzed, are likely to face Phase 3 or above, including 289,000 in Emergency, while humanitarian food assistance is declining.

Malnutrition and hidden hunger. Between April 2026 and March 2027, about 465,900 children aged 6 to 59 months and 246,300 pregnant and breastfeeding women are suffering, or are expected to suffer, acute malnutrition and need treatment (IPC, 2026b). In Karamoja alone, about 122,100 children are expected to be acutely malnourished, including 30,600 with severe malnutrition. Behind these emergency figures sits a chronic burden of nutrient deficiency. The 2022 Uganda Demographic and Health Survey found that 26% of children under five are stunted and 10.2% are underweight, and that only 7% of young children receive a minimum acceptable diet (Uganda Bureau of Statistics [UBOS]. More than half of children aged 6 to 59 months were anaemic in the 2016 survey (UBOS & ICF, 2018), and about one in three women of reproductive age is anaemic (Global Nutrition Report, 2022).

Food loss and waste. Food is also lost before it reaches a plate. The African Postharvest Losses Information System estimates that Uganda loses 16.4% of its maize after harvest, about 382,000 tonnes valued at more than US\$89 million. Weak storage, drying, transport and market infrastructure mean that a family in one district can go hungry while food spoils in another.

Food safety. Food that makes people sick does not meet the standard of adequate food. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2015) estimates that unsafe food causes 91 million illnesses and 137,000 deaths a year in Africa, and the Ministry of Health estimates that more than one million Ugandans suffer foodborne disease every year (“Uganda’s Food System Under Pressure,” 2025). Aflatoxin in maize and groundnuts, chemical residues in fresh produce and weak enforcement across fragmented institutions leave the poorest families, children and pregnant women the most exposed.

Overweight and obesity. While some Ugandans cannot find enough food, others are being harmed by poor quality food. The 2022 survey found that about 26% of women aged 15 to 49 and about 11% of men aged 15 to 54 are overweight or obese, and 2.8% of children under five are overweight (UBOS, 2023). Uganda is now carrying undernutrition and overweight side by side, which calls for food policy, practice and choices that make healthy diets affordable, a priority choice and not only taste and stomach pleasure.

Rising food prices, the fuel crisis and the import bill

Prices are rising on every front. The FAO Food Price Index averaged 136.0 points in September 2026, which is 5.8% above a year earlier, with the cereal index 17.2% higher (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations [FAO], 2026). At home, annual inflation for food crops and related items more than doubled from 2.1% in August to 4.5% in September, pushing headline inflation to 4.7%, while inflation for energy, fuel and utilities stands at 14.5% (“Weather-driven food prices,” 2026).

Fuel is making all of this worse. Crude oil rose from about US\$65 a barrel in February to a peak of US\$120 in March after the war in the Middle East disrupted supply, and climbed back above US\$100 in the first week of October (“Brace yourselves,” 2026). The Minister of Energy has told Parliament that pump prices have reached between Shs6,800 and Shs7,000 a litre, that the shilling has weakened from about Shs3,790 to about Shs4,035 to the dollar since early September, and that an additional Shs200 per litre in excise duty has applied since 1 July (The Independent, 2026). Every sack of maize, every bunch of matooke and every crate of milk that moves by road now carries that cost to the market, and the poorest households, who spend most of their income on food, absorb it first.

The import bill adds a further strain. Uganda is a net importer of cereals, edible oils and processed foods. Cereal imports alone were valued at more than US\$250 million in 2024, with rice accounting for about US\$125 million (United States Department of Agriculture, Foreign Agricultural Service [USDA FAS], 2025). When the shilling loses value, the shilling cost of every imported tonne of rice, wheat and cooking oil rises with it, and the country pays more for food than it has the land and the farmers to produce.

A Right, not a favour

The Right to adequate food is a legal and moral duty. Uganda has committed to it under international law, and to food and nutrition security through the Fourth National Development Plan (NDPIV), Sustainable Development Goals 2 and 13 and the Kampala CAADP Declaration. Without timely, integrated and innovative action on hunger, climate and food prices together, those commitments will not be met.

What FRA is calling for

FRA calls for the following actions, starting now.

- The Government of Uganda should immediately release contingency funds and scale up food, cash and nutrition assistance for Karamoja, the refugee hosting districts, hunger-stricken communities along the cattle corridor, urban slums, and other hot spots affected by the drought, using IPC findings as triggers, before the predicted El Niño rains set in.
- Government should prepare for floods as well as drought. Heavy El Niño rainfall is expected from October to December through the first quarter of 2027, so climate information, early warning, water harvesting and drought-and-flood-tolerant practices must reach farmers this season.
- The Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Energy should consider temporary measures that ease the cost of fuel and transport for moving food, including a review of fuel taxes, and should strengthen national food reserves so that food moves from surplus to deficit areas at fair prices.
- Government and partners should invest in storage, drying, market infrastructure and cold chains to cut postharvest losses, with clear targets and public reporting.

- Government should create awareness and accelerate action to reduce food loss and waste to achieve nutrition for all, improve the economy and conserve the environment.
- Government should establish a well-coordinated and adequately funded food safety system that enforces standards on aflatoxin, chemical residues and veterinary drug use from farm to table.
- The Ministries of Health and Education should act on overweight and obesity through school feeding standards, healthy diet promotion and policies that make nutritious food affordable.
- Government should publish an annual national food import bill and adopt a costed plan to produce more of what Uganda now imports, starting with rice, edible oils and wheat.
- Government should meet the financing commitments of the Kampala CAADP Declaration and protect budgets for agriculture, nutrition and climate adaptation as external aid declines.
- Development partners are urged to keep humanitarian funding steady while moving towards food systems transformation. The private sector is invited to bring innovation in storage, energy, finance and data to smallholder farmers, and not only to those who are easiest to reach. The media and citizens have a part to play in demanding safe, affordable and nutritious food and in holding leaders to account.

Innovation matters, and Uganda has much to build on. But an innovation that never reaches the hungry child in Kotido, the farmer in Masaka whose harvest dried in the field, or the mother who cannot afford a safe and balanced meal remains a promise on paper. The time to nourish tomorrow is today.

For Media Inquiries, please contact: Modesta Hope Maria

Communications and Advocacy Officer,

Food Rights Alliance

Email: communications@frauganda.org

Notes to editors

The Food Rights Alliance (FRA) is a Kampala based civil society organization with more than 40 member organizations, working on food systems governance, human rights based approaches to food and nutrition, and policy advocacy at national, regional and continental levels.