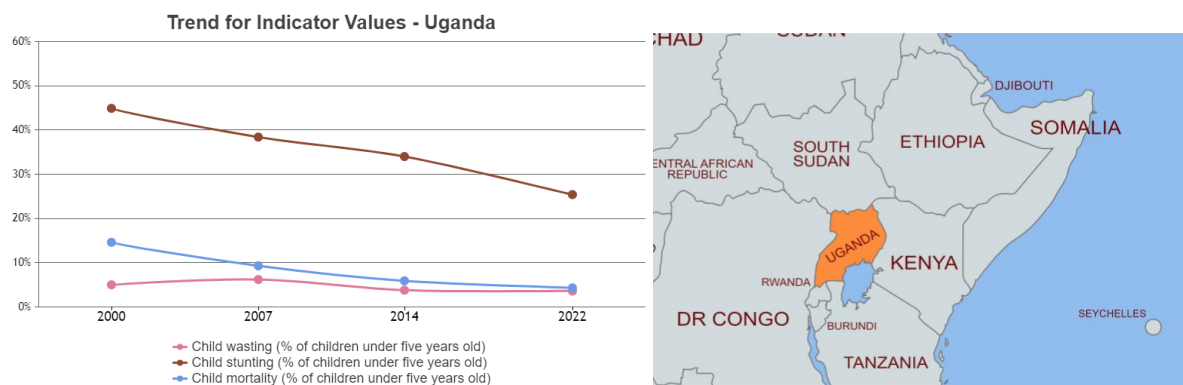


Uganda: Food insecurity a pressing concern

Introduction

Uganda suffers from high levels of food insecurity. As per the 2022 [Global Hunger Index](#), food insecurity in Uganda is classified as 'serious.' Despite the country's potential in agriculture and significant exports, and decline in child wasting, stunting and mortality over the years, malnutrition is widespread – 29 percent of children under the age of 5 are stunted and 53 percent are anemic and are at risk of not reaching their full mental and physical potential. According to the [Uganda Bureau of Statistics](#), the annual inflation rate for the year ending February 2021 was 2.3%, which increased to 3.2% in February 2022 and 9.2% in February 2023. As a result, the prices of essential food staples remain persistently elevated. Uganda produces more food than it consumes, yet access to nutritious food in the country is limited.



Credit: Global Hunger Index

According to a [report from UNICEF](#) adolescent girls and women in Uganda struggle to access nutritious diets, and poor nutrition is passed down through generations. Despite Uganda's recorded GDP growth of approximately 6.3% in 2022, the surge in commodity prices following the outbreak of conflict in Ukraine, limited extension services, especially for women, climate change impact, and limited access to inputs remain pressing concerns, disproportionately affecting women and children.

What causes food insecurity in Uganda?

The causes of food insecurity in Uganda are multifaceted – increasing climate vulnerability, political situation, gender inequality, rising conflict, increasing food prices, the prevalence of livestock diseases, poverty, landlessness, lack of education, and high fertility rates are some of the main causes of food insecurity.

Dependence on Agriculture and Climate Vulnerability: Agriculture, forestry and fishing account for [27% of the country's GDP with about 68% of Ugandans](#) employed in agriculture. The fact that most Ugandans depend on agriculture as a main source of income makes them highly vulnerable to food insecurity as the sector is plagued by challenges such as climatic uncertainties, recurrent droughts, and the scourge of diseases and pests. The situation is made worse when various regions within the country face food shortages due to severe weather and massive crop failures.

Gender Inequality: In Uganda, food insecurity is a greater problem for women and female-headed households. Although an estimated [77% of women are engaged in agricultural](#) work as compared to 67%

of men, yet gender norms impact women's engagement and productivity in farming. Gender inequality, especially financial inequality based on gender causes food insecurity among women in Uganda. Many banks [limit their access to financial credit or bank accounts](#) due to women's lack of access to collateral and limited credit information [8% less likely to be approved for loans](#) than men and are more likely to obtain smaller loans, largely due to a fear of debt.

68% of women in Uganda are engaged in agriculture as compared of 58% of men.

The Ukraine Conflict: [The Ukraine crisis](#) led to the rise in cost of healthy diets for Ugandan households, this was primarily driven by increasing prices of edible oils. It was observed that the crisis has much more impact on diet quality of the people than in their household incomes for poverty. There is a widening gap between households' consumption levels and what is required to achieve a healthy diet, caused by higher food prices. Although this global crisis may not have a huge impact on Uganda's overall economy, its adverse effects on poverty and food insecurity is likely to be more pronounced.

Best practices

The [Development Initiative for Northern Uganda \(DINU\)](#) was a 38-month long project (January 2020 to February 2023) with an aim to improve food security, maternal and child nutrition, and household incomes for smallholder farmers in 11 districts of Uganda. The project has three major outcomes: increased production of diversified food by both men and women smallholder farmers, enhanced market accessibility for these farmers, and improved nutrition and family planning services through gender-responsive community-based approaches. As a result, there was a significant 16.3% increase in adoption and production of diverse food crops and animal products, as well as 23.8% increase in the adoption of climate-smart technologies among the project participants. In the regions of Karamoja Sub-region and Katakwi districts, 40% of smallholder farmers reported improved food security, with 49.3% (46.6% female and 53.7% male) adopting the production of diversified food crops and animal products. Additionally, 74.4% of smallholder farmers (9.8% female and 9.4% male) adopted at least three new climate-smart agricultural technologies. Market accessibility also improved, with 15.8% of smallholder farmers reporting increased income, and 92.4% (91.7% female and 93.7% male) belonging to community groups partnering with financial and technical institutions or market operators. Moreover, the project contributed to improved nutrition and increased uptake of Family Planning services through gender-responsive community-based approaches in the target regions.

Increased production of diversified food: The production of diverse and nutritious food was increased by 35% for 73,892 smallholder farmers. This was achieved through adoption and production of diverse food and animal products by mobilization and training of farmers in selected value chains; increased access to input and output markets; increased access to savings and credits by training and support to VSLAs, and linkages to financial institutions.

Farmers became more skilled: 73,892 farmers were trained on adoption of climate-smart agriculture practices such as variety selection, land preparation row planting, disease and pest management, and post-harvest handling. 14,779 smallholder farmers (8,610 females and 6,169 males) were trained in cotton and organic sesame production. A total of 2,700 farmers were trained in crop and livestock husbandry

and facilitation skills. Of the 2,700 farmers trained, 407 were recruited as both buying agents and local suppliers of quality seeds locally, which contributed to increased access to markets and increased household income.

More women had access to credit: The project increased access to credit by 44.6% (from 59.6% to 79.3%) among female small holder farmers. By the end of the project 1,247 VSLAs and 513 Savings Internal Lending Community (SILC) groups were able to save UGX 3 billion and provided credit worth UGX 2 billion to its members. The funds accessed by members were invested to purchase productive assets and invest in income-generating activities.

Farmers had increased access to markets: 63.4% of smallholder farmers (both women and men) recorded increased market accessibility of which 8.6% with earnings over UGX 1 million annually. This was attributed to adoption of contract farming, value addition and collective marketing using the FFBS and PMG models. The use of market-based approaches, such as contract farming and value addition, in combination with capacity building contributed to improved market access, higher incomes, and increased food and nutrition security.

Improved nutrition through gender responsive community-based approaches: This Project contributed to increased utilization of family planning and modern contraceptive measures, child spacing and reduced cases of teenage pregnancies. To improve nutrition and uptake of family planning services, the Mother Care Group (MCG) approach was used to promote behavior change through peer-to-peer support. 2,700 household caregiver groups were formed by the project which comprised 19,000 pregnant and lactating women and caregivers of children under five. 2,700 role model men were trained to champion gender and women empowerment, SRHR and family planning. The project contributed to an 18.2% increase in community appreciation of SRHR (family planning) which resulted in a 15% increase in demand for SRHR services.

“Talking about family planning freely in my community is not yet embraced and many women are not familiar with their sexual rights! And so it has not been easy for me and my fellow women to openly speak about it if this project had not strengthened our knowledge which has given us the courage to speak openly on the importance of SRHR and family planning among our group members and peers.” - Hellen Alupo, 31, mother of six, Abim District, Uganda.

Recommendations

Active engagement and ownership of stakeholders: Active engagement and involvement of local authorities, government agencies, private sector actors, and community members throughout the project implementation process helps foster ownership and sustainability.

Integration of multiple sectors and approaches: Integration of various sectors such as agriculture, health, livelihoods, and gender prove effective in addressing complex challenges faced by smallholder farmers. A multisectoral approach helps achieve synergies, maximize resources, and provide comprehensive support to the target communities.

Value chain development and market linkages: The focus on value chain development and market linkages strengthens the economic sustainability of smallholder farmers. By facilitating access to markets, promoting business partnerships, and enhancing value addition, farmers are able to increase their income and improve their livelihoods. The engagement of private sector actors as key partners contributes to the sustainability of these market-based interventions.

Knowledge sharing and capacity building: Collaboration with government agencies, research institutions, and local organizations help build institutional capacity and promote sustainable practices. The emphasis on knowledge sharing, capacity building, and skills development plays a crucial role in empowering farmers and promotes sustainable practices.

Policy engagement and institutionalization: Active engagement with policymakers, local authorities, and government structures facilitates policy dialogues, institutionalization of project activities, and mainstreaming of sustainable practices. By aligning with existing government plans, signing MoUs, and integrating project activities into district plans, the project can enhance the likelihood of sustained support and replication of successful interventions beyond the project duration.

Overall, CARE's work in Uganda has shown that investing in women by providing them with knowledge, resources and information about food security within households can play a significant role in enhancing food security. We must aim to engage all stakeholders, especially women, in development activities and integrate various sectors to address the complex challenges of farmers and food insecurity. Understanding how women access and utilize resources and empowering them with essential tools to improve their decision making can significantly reduce food insecurity.