

# Working Together for a Better Future in Uganda

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## Fighting Malnutrition: A Call to Action for Civil Society Organizations Working in Food Security and Agriculture

December 2017

**Despite increased food production in Uganda, malnutrition is still a critical problem because many households are food insecure. Agriculture is essential to promoting food security and can be leveraged to improve nutrition. In Uganda:**

- Malnutrition can take many forms, including chronic malnutrition (stunting, or low height-for-age), underweight (low weight-for-age), acute malnutrition (wasting, or low weight-for-height), anaemia, vitamin A deficiency, iodine deficiency, and low birth weight less than 2.5 kg.<sup>1,2</sup>
- Almost one-third of children under 5 and 1 of 3 women suffer from malnutrition in Uganda.<sup>1</sup>
- Children who are malnourished are at greater risk of infections, such as diarrhoea and pneumonia, which in turn increases the risk of malnutrition. Malnourished children also have a greater risk of developing chronic diseases, such as diabetes and heart disease, in adulthood.<sup>3,4</sup>
- Food insecurity is a significant underlying cause of malnutrition. Factors that lead to food insecurity are multifaceted and are often a result of high food prices, low agricultural productivity, climate change, landlessness, natural disasters, lack of education, and the fact that a majority of Ugandans depend on agriculture as a main source of income. Gender inequality, which limits women's control of household resources and decision making, only worsens food insecurity and poverty.
- Poor growth in children hinders the potential of Uganda's future labour force. Iron deficiency anaemia and stunting result in reduced labour productivity, which impedes agricultural production and slows the progress of development.<sup>4,5</sup> Fifty-four percent of the current labour force was stunted in childhood.<sup>4</sup>
- Malnutrition due to stunting, iron deficiency anaemia, iodine deficiency, and low birth weight will cost Uganda more than 19 trillion Ugandan Shillings (US\$7.7 billion) in lost productivity by 2025.<sup>5</sup>



Photo credit: Jessica Scranton, FHI 360

*Improving nutrition will improve agricultural productivity.*

- Agriculture systems can inadvertently harm household nutrition if:
  - A woman's role in child care is compromised due to her workload
  - Workload increases without an increase in food consumed
  - Men and women are exposed to hazardous conditions that affect their health, including unsanitary conditions
  - Food prices increase, causing families to eat fewer varieties of foods

A healthy and productive workforce in Uganda is needed to improve and sustain agricultural productivity.

### How can improved nutrition support the work of civil society organizations working in food security and agriculture?

- The agriculture and nutrition sectors are interdependent and synergistic. Improving nutrition would lead to increased productivity—including in the agriculture sector—resulting in economic productivity gains exceeding 4.3 trillion Ugandan Shillings (US\$1.7 billion) by 2025.<sup>5</sup>

### Civil society organizations working in agriculture and food security can support improved nutrition in Uganda by:

- Supporting integration of nutrition in agriculture plans, policies, and programmes.
- Advocating for more resources to implement proven household-level agricultural interventions that can improve household food security and nutrition.
- Promoting sustainable production and consumption of diverse foods, including encouraging families to buy nutritious foods in the market place.
- Supporting the development of guidance on food storage and consumption by household members.
- Advocating for stronger food safety regulations and fostering safe post-harvest handling and storage practices to reduce contamination and infections.
- Promoting women's access to and control over productive resources, capital, and income generation.
- Promoting the use of labour-saving technologies to help women manage competing priorities and their caring, reproductive, and productive roles.
- Promoting opportunities to train women in agro-processing at the household level.
- Increasing wages for male and female agricultural workers and ensuring that men and women receive equal pay for equal work to increase families' ability to buy nutritious foods.
- Ensuring safe working conditions for agricultural workers, including proper sanitation.
- Providing opportunities to diversify household income.
- Promoting the adoption of high-yield nutritious crops and small livestock production, including small ruminants.
- Ensuring food, especially staples such as millet, sweet potatoes, sorghum, matooke, and maize, remain affordable for families.
- Intensifying nutrition and health behaviour change interventions within agricultural interventions, with a focus on men and influencers of behaviour at the household and community levels.

