

A Strategic Review of Sustainable Development Goal 2 in Uganda

By Economic Policy Research Centre (EPRC)

This blog post provides a synthesis of the review of Sustainable Development Goal 2 in Uganda and recommendations envisaged to ensure that the country attains food and nutrition security.

The aim of the Sustainable Development Goal 2 (SDG2) is to “end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture by 2030”. The Government of Uganda (GoU) integrated all SDGs in the National Development frameworks. A Strategic Review of SDG2¹ was undertaken with the aim to examine Uganda’s preparedness in achieving the goal and its five targets. The Review presents an in-depth analysis of the Food and Nutrition Security (FNS) situation in Uganda and examines the extent to which existing policies, legal and institutional frameworks and programmes have addressed the food and nutrition issues in the country. The Review further identifies gaps and makes recommendations of strategic interventions the country needs to implement in order to facilitate the achievement of SDG2 and its targets in an inclusive manner. While the Review focuses on SDG2, it recognizes the inter-linkages between the overall 17 goals for sustainable development. The Strategic Review is mainly based on data collected by the Uganda Bureau of Statistics, and more specifically from the five waves of the Uganda National Panel Household Survey which were conducted during the period between 2009/10 and 2015/16. Other datasets used include the Uganda Demographic and Health Surveys and the Agricultural Technology and Agribusiness Advisory Services dataset.

The depth of hunger in the country remains high

On average, four out of every ten Ugandans are unable to meet the required dietary intake. There is a high reliance on staples for caloric intakes and yet their productivity is low, which is likely to affect future food security prospects.

The diets of most Ugandans remain inadequate both in terms of quantity (adequacy and availability) and quality (diversity and safety). On average, in the last seven years, Ugandans have been consuming 1,860 kcal per day, as opposed to the minimum required intake of 2,200 kcal per person per day. Although there has been an improvement in the quality of diets as reflected by a dietary diversity score

¹ NPA (National Planning Authority) and WFP (World Food Programme). 2007. Towards Zero Hunger. A Strategic Review of Sustainable Development Goal 2 in Uganda.

(number of food groups consumed over time) that grew from 7.6 in 2009/10 to 8.2 in 2015/16, the improvement remains below the average recommended score of 9.2.

While the SDGs are hinged on the premise that no one is left behind, the findings reveal uneven progress in improving the food security situation across the country. The trends in caloric intake, based on Uganda's geographical regions, shows that eastern Uganda is regressing, registering an increase in the prevalence of food insecurity from 33 to 46 percent during the 2009/10 and 2015/16 reporting periods. Despite the low caloric intake observed in the eastern and northern regions, households in these regions consume a wider variety of food groups relative to their counterparts in the western region. Apparently, the expansion of cash crop production in eastern Uganda (especially sugar cane and rice), is achieved at the cost of food production. This factor coupled with increasing land fragmentation appears to have compromised FNS in eastern Uganda.

Major causes of food and nutrition insecurity

Low agricultural productivity: There are significant crop yield gaps between on-farm yields and those attainable at research stations. The low crop yield has negative implications for the food security of Ugandans, especially those who mostly depend on their own food production for subsistence. The low agricultural productivity is mainly due to low access to extension services and adoption of agricultural-enhancing technologies (such as fertilisers, improved seeds, and irrigation), and uncertainties around the land tenure system.

Constrained land rights: There are important provisions in the current legal frameworks, which have also been operationalized, such as spouse consent to sell land or use land as collateral in the bank to access formal credit. However, despite some of these positive developments, the current land tenure system, growing land inequalities, fragmented land markets, and low formal land titling, continue to negatively impact households' decisions to invest in Sustainable Land Management (SLM) practices to boost their agricultural production and productivity, and support FNS. Less than 30 percent of cultivated land is under SLM approaches and this partly explains the low crop yields.

Limited use of sustainable land management practices: Less than 30 percent of cultivated land is under Sustainable Land Management (SLM) approaches and this partly explains the low crop yields. A larger share of land used for cash crops is under SLM compared to food crops, and this negatively affects food crop yields. With respect to irrigation, less than 0.5 percent of cultivated land is irrigated and most of this land is for rice and sugarcane cultivations.

Increasing occurrence of weather related shocks: Weather related factors, such as climate variability (e.g. drought), are cited as the major causes of inadequate food availability, which in turn results in higher food prices, which especially affect those individuals who depend on the market. As a consequence, a large portion of Ugandans are vulnerable to food insecurity. Although Ugandan households adopt a variety of strategies to cope with the consequences of climate changes, the overall resilience to shocks and climate variability is generally weak. In addition, the mitigation measures that have been adopted to address food shortages are *ad-hoc* and oftentimes unsustainable. For instance, the reduction in meals consumed in a day compromises future food security status, while distressed livestock sales severely affect household asset holdings, reducing resilience to future shocks.

Inadequate public funding for Food and Nutrition Security: Overall spending on FNS in Uganda is inadequate under the current financing framework due to the fact that government funding for FNS activities is not distinguished from other activities. It is also difficult to identify specific FNS funding within sectoral budgets. This low budget allocation has partly affected the implementation of proposed programmes under the Uganda Nutrition Action Plan (UNAP). For instance, expenditures on research and development, which are critical for generation of drought resistant varieties to ensure climate resilience, are generally very low.

"Death" of critical institutions: A number of institutions that are critical for insuring food security at the household level and overall public health level are no longer existent. These include the Mutongole chief, farmer field schools, and school gardens. For instance, the lack of farmer field schools and school gardens has not only contributed to low skills development in agriculture starting from an early age, but it has also contributed to children being hungry while at school. Though development partners have come in to fill this void through provision of school meals in specific districts, this is not a sustainable response.

Inadequate food storage facilities: The 1995 Constitution calls for the establishment of national food reserves. However, at present, Uganda has no emergency food reserves. The few available food reserves (e.g., those operated by The Uganda Grain Council and those established with support from WFP in specific districts) are small and are mostly grain silos owned by private entities. Unlike its neighbours, such as Kenya and Tanzania, Uganda has very limited policy options to address sudden food shortages.

What can government do?

- a) The GoU, with support from development partners, should develop and facilitate an effective early warning dissemination process and build the capacities of citizens to evaluate risks as well as strategies for avoiding food insecurity.
- b) Promote household-level water harvesting and fast-track the establishment of small-scale irrigation dams as an opportunity to increase access to water for agricultural production. This will enhance agricultural production and productivity, particularly in drought-affected areas.
- c) Create awareness about the importance of sustainable land management and productive use of land.
- d) Consider land reforms such as: operationalization of the land fund, promoting equitable land ownership rights, land consolidation, and sensitization of ordinary citizenry and land holding elites on their rights and responsibilities; Fast track systematic land ownership and equitable land rights to enhance land rights, increase investments in land, better soil conservation, improve land use efficiency and access to credit; Levy a reasonable tax on land to act as an incentive to promote use of land for productive activities; Institute functioning and regulated land markets, thus harmonizing the interests of landlords and tenants; and Through legislation and administrative actions, place a ceiling on the land holding size.
- e) Provide incentives and enforce sanctions to relevant institutions for effective implementation of FNS interventions. Also, there is need to rebuild the state capacity to regulate and enforce food production at the community level through the Parish Chief (e.g. Mutongole Chief). Local governments should develop ordinances and by-laws to ensure regulation on food production at a community level.
- f) Fast track the Food and Nutrition Bill into an Act of Parliament to strengthen coordination, financing and the institutional framework for supporting multi-sectoral food and nutrition interventions.

Achieving SDG2

It is clear that the depth of hunger in Uganda remains high, and the main causes are low agricultural productivity, constrained land rights, limited use of sustainable land management practices, climate variability, inadequate funding for FNS interventions,

extinction of critical institutions, and inadequate food storage facilities. Therefore, for Uganda to attain a state of zero hunger, it needs to pay closer attention to these risk factors.