

Nutritional gardens improve diet

A recent report by the National Planning Authority revealed that Uganda is among the countries where levels of hunger remain high (NPA, 2017). According to this report, the daily diet of Ugandans only comprises 1,860 calories instead of 2,200, which indicates that the country may not attain Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Two. SDG 2 commits countries to end hunger, achieve food security, improve nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.

Funding for the agriculture sector in Uganda has in the financial year 2017/18 been boosted with an increase of Shs828b. However, it may be too early to tell how this increased budget will facilitate and contribute to the realisation of the citizen's rights to food, especially improved nutrition. While problems with diet affect broad sections of the population, the most negatively affected are children.

The report states 'Uganda has for long struggled to feed her people, especially children below the age of five, who remain stunted due to poor feeding'. The age could even go up to 10 years, during which time children's brain



development and learning abilities are affected for the rest of their lives.

Uganda currently has a government-initiated school feeding programme aimed at addressing short-term hunger while making learning easier for children, reducing dropout rates, encouraging enrolment and enabling the government to achieve its overall education goals.

However, it is restricted to a few regions in northern Uganda and relies heavily on time-bound donor support. Besides, it does not promote the consumption of diverse nutritious foods essential for children's growth and overall

development.

A new approach, planting nutritional gardens in institutions of learning, would present a much more viable prospect for readily available nutritious foods for students to supplement their diets. The presence and use of school gardens provide valuable real-life lessons about nutrition and diets that students will rely on long after leaving school. The long-term proposal is for the nutritional gardens to be embraced as part and parcel of the curriculum with the active participation and involvement of students and teachers.

At demonstration sites, a variety of crops would be grown, including legumes and vegetables, to give students practical knowledge they can take back home. Traditional endangered crop species could also be preserved through the gardens.

If implemented, nutritional gardens could be the magic bullet to improved nutrition not only of children, but also of expectant mothers, thereby also helping to reduce current high rates of maternal mortality.

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