

# Uganda feeling the HUNGER PANGS

By Vision Reporters

Despite the short-lived rain seasons, Rose Arot, a resident of Magoro in Katakwi district, has not given up on farming.

## Wetlands on the line

Arot and several people in her village have decided to farm in the wetlands as a way of circumventing the problem of water scarcity. By planting crops in both the high and low-lying areas (wetlands), Arot and her colleagues spread the risk of crop loss in case of a prolonged dry spell.

They started this practice last year, when the first rains frustrated them.

Arot, a mother of five, says because of this practice, her harvest has not been as bad as it could have been.

Alex Opolot, another resident of Magoro who owns cattle, says he used to graze his cattle in the wetlands but of late, farmers and charcoal burners have invaded them.

Because of this, Opolot has been forced to sell some of his cattle to buy food.

Arot and Opolot's story is a microcosm of the problem in many parts of Uganda.

## Soroti

Just like other districts in Teso sub-region, Soroti is facing a food shortage.

In 2015, most parts of Teso were hit by floods, which led to the rotting of cassava and sweet potatoes, which are the main food crops.

There was a reduction in crop yields in the region, which has been worsened by the prolonged dry spell.

"We can hardly get what to eat. We usually have one meal a day but on some occasions we go without food," Michael Ocen, a farmer in Soroti district, says.

## Food prices rise

Food prices and cases of theft have also increased in most parts of Teso.

"People are even stealing cooked food from the houses. I am selling ropes and straw grass for survival," Jennifer Akello, a resident of Kyere sub-county, says.

Akello, a mother of seven, sells a rope at between sh500

and sh2,000 to get money to buy food.

Joyce Abeja, a resident of Kamuda sub-county in Soroti, says she survives on porridge.

"We do casual labour in exchange for potatoes. We are given half a basin of fresh potatoes which we pound, dry, grind and make porridge," she says, adding that they cannot bread out of it because it makes runs out faster.

## Leaders speak out

Michael Odiedo, the LCI chairperson of Owalei village, Opuyo parish in Soroti sub-county, says the few people who have food crops in their gardens guard them at night.

He says he has advised people in his area not to sell the little food they have.

"My LCI committee has resolved not to allow anybody to come to our village with a truck to buy food," Odiedo says.

## Early preparation

Having felt the pangs of the dry spell, some of the families have started preparing their gardens for the next season.

"I do not want my family to die of hunger. That is why I have started preparing my garden early," Johnson Otigo, a resident of Kichinjaji ward in Soroti town, says.

## Ngora

"One cannot go for a kilometre without seeing gardens of cassava that has dried up," Ngora district chairperson Bernard Eumu says.

Eumu says the nature of the soil, which is sandy, poses the risk of leaching and erosion in his district, especially when poor cultivation methods are used.

The district production officer, Dr John Opolot, says over 6,952



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people are in need of food aid.

Many parents whose children were studying in private schools have sent them to Universal Primary Education (UPE) schools because they can no longer afford to pay school fees.

"Most of the parents have taken their children to the UPE schools," Charles Ediau, the proprietor of Jameler Foundation Schools in Soroti and Amuria, says.

## Bukedea

In Bukedea district in eastern Uganda, the most affected sub-counties include Malera and Koli, where people are asking their leaders to ensure that the Government gives them relief food.

Disaster preparedness minister Musa Ekwero, who is also MP for Amuria, says the Office of the Prime Minister has sent relief food to some parts of the region but it is not enough.

"There is serious famine in Teso region and the Government is doing what it can to help the people. Some

districts have already received food," he says.

## Kumi

Kumi district chairperson Christine Apolot said: "There are numerous food and nutritional problems. The public health situation is also deteriorating and there is widespread depression."

"Many people are depressed," she says, adding that domestic violence is on the rise.

## Rakal

Rakai district in southwestern Uganda has been one of the districts most hit by the current dry spell.

For two consecutive seasons, the rains have not been enough and as a result, crops and livestock have died.

The most affected sub-counties are Kacheera, Kiziba, Lwamagwa, Kyalulungira, Byakabanda, Kakuuto, Kyebe, Kibanda, Kasasa, Kirumba, Nabigasa, Kabira and Kasali.

Janet Nalubega, a resident of Kamuganja village in Kakuuto county, says they have been



Torrential rains lead to flooding in most parts of Teso sub-region. Gardens with crops ready for harvest are submerged. They end up rotting

2015 leading to a massive drop in yields. Farmers count losses with the hope of getting better yields the following season

## MID-2016

Farmers prepare gardens despite the previous crop failure, farmers plant crops only to be greeted

by intermittent rains that lead to massive crop failure, resulting in crop losses for the farmers.

## LATE 2016

forced to encroach on wetlands because of water scarcity.

She says the wetlands enable them to get water for irrigating their crops.

Perez Muhirwe, a farmer in Kiyumbakimu village in Kagamba sub-county, says they have managed to survive the dry spell by using the water from Kiyumbakimu dam.

## Rukungiri

Rukungiri district in western has not been spared by the dry spell. Joseph Mugisha, a farmer

Because of the previous erratic weather patterns, there is a shortage of food in the country.

in Kitumba village, Rukungiri municipality, says food prices are the highest ever. The price of food has risen while that of animals has dropped.

He says a 25kg bag of maize flour goes for sh58,000, while a goat is now at only sh50,000 in Nyamayenje market.

## The situation in different districts in the country

### AMURIA

Over 23,000 people in the district are in need of food aid. The district chairperson, Robert Okitoi, says they will institute stringent rules on selling and buying food.

### KATAKWI

Sources in the district production office say over 168,000 people are in need of food aid. Most residents are having one meal per day. The situation has been blamed on the dry spell.

### KABERAMAIDO

The district production officer, Joseph Eriau, says over 100,000 people are affected. Residents say food used to be taken from the villages to the town but it is now the reverse.

### SERERE

Serere district production officer Caroline Asekenye says 27,247 people in the area need food aid. The food situation has been blamed on intermittent rains and the dry spell.

### WAKISO

Joseph Muzenze, the chairperson of Namayumba sub-county in Wakiso district, has advised Namayumba residents to use the little food they have sparingly.