

Insecurity

Storage

Policy

By David Lumu

"Children are going to school hungry. One in three school children have no food to eat during the school day. With no national strategy currently in place to address this, it is making learning difficult and negatively impacting education in Uganda.

Under the current policy, parents are supposed to ensure that their children have sufficient food at school, but there is no means of enforcing this policy," reveals a new report, reigniting the debate on whether the Government should provide lunch or parents should pack food for their children.

Failure by parents to pack food for day school students has thrown 66% of children in the country into chronic hunger crisis, a new report by the National Planning Authority (NPA) has revealed.

According to Dr John Ssekamatte, the manager population and social sector planning at the NPA, who conducted the research, the number of stunted children in the country has also slightly reduced from 35% in 2010 to 27%, with the western region registering the highest number of stunted children.

Undernourishment, Ssekamatte added, is more pronounced in northern and eastern regions.

"Undernourishment is worse in rural areas, yet it is the rural areas that are supposed to feed people in the urban areas. Uganda is no longer food secure," he said.

Ssekamatte was yesterday speaking at the launch of the strategic review of the structural and strategic positioning of the country in the fight against hunger at Imperial Royale Hotel in Kampala. Ending hunger by 2030 is goal number two of the new 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The report, which covered a period of 2009 to 2016, notes that 10 million Ugandans are facing an acute food shortage, with 1.6 million in a dire hunger crisis.

66% school children denied food – report



Gen. Moses Ali (centre) with the chairman National Planning Authority, Dr Wilberforce Kisamba Mugerwa (left) and the Minister of State for Finance, Gabriel Ajedra, after the launch of the report at Imperial Royale Hotel in Kampala yesterday. Photo by Juliet Kasirye

Fourty percent of Ugandans, according to the report, are undernourished.

According to the First Deputy Prime Minister, Gen. Moses Ali, who represented the Prime Minister, Dr. Ruhakana Rugunda at the launch of the report, there is a need to strategise on how to ensure that children have a meal at school.

Ali said although the government

policy is that guardians and parents should pack food for children, the 66% figure indicates that all stakeholders must discuss the way forward when it comes to feeding day school children.

"It is unfair. When children do not eat well, it means that there is no human development. I think we need to strategise, work with all stakeholders and ensure that children have a meal while at school," he said,

warning parents who do not feed children of criminal charges.

"What reason can you give to let the child stunt? This is criminal, especially if you have food and deny the child the opportunity to grow properly. The government policy is that the guardian should take on feeding of school-going children," he added.

Experts have attributed the food insecurity stress to a number of

KEY FINDINGS

- Only 30% of the arable land in Uganda is cultivated
- Obesity in women has increased in the last 20 years
- Less than 0.5% of cultivated land in the country is irrigated
- At 3%, population growth is outpacing the 2% agricultural growth
- Only 4% of households in Uganda are food secure

shortfalls, including failure by the Government to establish national food storage reserves, poor quality farm inputs, climate change shocks and the diminishing arable land for agriculture in the country.

"Only one out of every five parcel holdings had a formal title in 2015/16, with only a small share of females with parcel holdings having land registered in their names," the reported noted.

According to Dr. Joseph Muvawala, the executive director of NPA, the report is the first attempt by the country to assess the implementation of the sustainable development goals.

"Unless we engage in planning, it is unlikely that we shall achieve much," he said.

El Khidir Daloum, the World Food Programme (WFP) country representative, said achieving zero hunger by 2030 is a key responsibility of government and a crucial need for the achievement of the Vision 2040 target.

"I must thank the Government of Uganda for the political commitment and determination you have shown by aligning SDGs to the national planning policies," Daloum said.

According to Stanlake Samkange, the director programme and policy division at WFP, Uganda has integrated 75% of the SDGs into the national planning strategy.