

ates

SELL
3790
5105
4495
37.4
17
315
1041
4.5

Business News

FTSE

Up at
7701.77

CAC

Up at
5465.53

DAX

Up at
12724.27

DOW JONES

Up at
4635.21

Karamoja transitions from food aid recipient to seller

By Faridah Kulabako

From a young age, Emmanuel Loumo, 27, of Namalu Nakapiripirit district, in Karamoja sub-region, knew he had to look after cattle as a means of survival, just like his father and other members in his community.

Although his mother grew some sorghum for food, Loumo never perceived farming as an activity he could pursue to earn a living and ensure food security for the family.

Thus, cultivation was always left to the mother, who could hardly cultivate enough to feed a family of seven.

As such, they largely depended on food provided by the World Food Programme (WFP) that could at times not last many days because of the size of the family.

Loumo recalls how they at times went for several days on empty stomachs, although his father owned several head of cattle.

His eyes were, however, opened in 2011 when WFP, together with Agency for Technical Co-operation and Development (ACTED) sensitised and trained the Karimojong to engage in farming to not only ensure food security, but also diversify their revenue streams.

Tired of being dependent on on food aid, Loumo grabbed the opportunity and started growing maize.

Today, Loumo, who also doubles as a store's manager at Namalu Farmers' Association, Nakapiripirit, is among the farmers who have made history for Karamoja. For the first time last week, Karamoja sold food to WFP, signaling the transitioning of the area from UN food aid recipient to its supplier.

WFP bought 98 metric tonnes of maize from the Karamoja sub-region in the districts of Nakapiripirit and Napak, which it bought through two bulking satellite centres at Namalu and Irti.

The two \$200,000 (about sh748.9m) satellite points were constructed to enable farmers bulk their produce, store and market collectively.

The WFP country director, El Khidir Daloum, said buying 98 metric tonnes of high quality maize from the sub-region marks the beginning of the transformation process, where the region is moving from an emergency situation to a developmental situation. Daloum made the remarks during the event to mark this first purchase of maize at the Irti satellite centre.

He added that buying food from Karamoja to supply to schools in the sub-region was a



Emmanuel Loumo, the store manager at Namalu Farmers' Association, shows the packed maize ready for collection by WFP at the Namalu satellite collection centre

BETWEEN THE LINES: The benefits

■ El Khidir Daloum, the WFP country director, said buying food from Karamoja to supply to schools in the sub-region is a cost-effective and efficient move that will further encourage farmers to grow more food.

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"We have been buying this food from other regions in Uganda or even outside the country and incurring huge transport costs to bring it here, but we will save that money and instead use it to buy more food," he said.

WFP bought the maize at sh1,350 per kilogramme, which farmers said is a good price compared to an average of sh800 that middlemen normally pay per kilogramme.

Daloum commended the Government for restoring peace in the sub-region, saying peace is fundamental for humanitarian development to happen.

He explained that WFP, together with ACTED, agriculture ministry and the National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS) have over the years been interesting the Karimojong to engage in crop production and storage so as to increase their incomes and address their nutritional needs.

Unlocking potential

Daloum said constructing satellite collection points and training farmers in modern farming and post-harvest handling practices was a step in unlocking the huge untapped potential of smallholder farmers in Uganda.

"Everything is being done to explore the full potential of

smallholder farmers; satellite collection points should not be looked at in isolation; it is part of the other interventions being undertaken to support smallholder farmers to realise their full potential.

"This is simply a means to an end; we need to achieve zero hunger in Uganda. There is no reason why a country as blessed as Uganda should have starving people. We are currently working with only 1,000 farmers in the Karamoja sub-region. We need to increase the number so as to address the food security challenge in the country," Daloum said.

He commended the farmers for the high quality of the maize produced, saying it meets international standards.

"At WFP, we cannot compromise the quality and standards. This is a landmark; people have a stereotype that you are pastoralists and cattle rustlers but you are now into farming, you are changing that stereotype," he said.

Smart silos

To ensure proper post-harvest handling practices, WFP provided farmers with a tarpaulin for drying the grains and smart plastic and metallic silos for proper storage, at a subsidised price.

However, farmers requested WFP to provide more silos to enable them keep larger quantities of produce for longer

as they seek better prices to avoid being exploited by middlemen who buy cheaply during bumper harvest.

"We are grateful to WFP for bringing modern silos, which help us keep our produce longer than the traditional granaries. Middlemen can no longer take away our produce at a giveaway price," Margaret Lote, a farmer in Namalu sub-county, said.

Tengei Mario Lokut, the Nakapiripirit district agricultural officer, said: "We used to have a big challenge; WFP had a contract to buy maize from farmers in Kapchorwa, but they did not have enough quantities. They (middlemen) would come to Nakapiripirit and buy our maize cheaply, mix it with theirs and sell it to WFP and WFP would bring it back to Karamoja to feed our people."

The agriculture ministry's senior agricultural and nutrition officer, Stephen Birbonwa, said WFP's 'purchase for progress programme' in Karamoja would ensure food security and nutrition safety.

The head of WFP Karamoja area office, Mohamed Satti, urged farmers in Karamoja to explore other markets to sell the surplus produce that is not bought by WFP.

"WFP is only one market, but there are plenty of markets available for you and you should take advantage of them," Satti said.

The state minister for Karamoja affairs, Moses Kizige, applauded WFP, saying the initiative is a sustainable model because it empowers the Karimojong to produce their own food and better positions them to market the surplus to increase household incomes.