

# Drought pushes poverty to 27%

By David Lumu

A combination of drought, price fluctuations and a rise in crop and livestock diseases has pushed more Ugandans below the poverty line, a new survey by the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) has revealed.

According to the 2016/2017 Uganda National Household Survey, the poverty index in the country has jumped from 19% to 27%, with Busoga, Bukedi and Karamoja as the worst affected sub-regions. A total of 17,320 households were sampled.

Speaking during the release of the report at Statistics House in Kampala yesterday, Vincent Fred Ssennono, the UBOS lead researcher, said for subsistence farmers, poverty has increased from 23% to 36%, a trend largely blamed on drought and general changes in the price of food.

"Communities blame drought, price changes, crop and livestock diseases, storms, power outages and displacement by infrastructure projects for the rising poverty levels due to disruptions of farming, which is the main source of income for subsistence farmers," he said.

"The population of poor people has gone up from 19% to 27%. Poverty is more pronounced in Busoga, Bukedi and Karamoja," he added.

At least 39% of Ugandans, the report noted, depend on subsistence farming. "When people fail to get jobs, they go back to the village and dig," Ssennono said.

Yet the report notes that less than 2% of Ugandan households use irrigation as a method to



**Maize, one of the country's staple foods was badly affected last year due to the armyworm attack**

counteract drought shocks.

Last year, prolonged dry spell hit several parts of the country, leaving millions of farmers, including cultivators and herdsman, counting losses as their crops dried up and animals starved to death due to lack of pasture and water.

The armyworm also struck farmers, eating up several cash crops such as maize, peas, sorghum and beans. The combination of the dry spell and pest attacks left over nine million people in dire need of food aid.

Of the current country's population

of 37.7 million, the number of Ugandans in gainful employment is nine million. This means the rest depend on agriculture to earn a living.

## **90% use firewood**

Experts are now saying poverty is forcing Ugandans to destroy the environment to earn a living.

The report states that almost every household in the country either uses charcoal or firewood for cooking.

"Over 90% of the households use wood fuel for cooking," Ssennono said, urging the National Environment

Management Authority (NEMA) to devise interventions that might save the depletion of forests in the country.

The survey also indicates that access to clean water and electricity has improved.

Clean water coverage is at 80%, while access to electricity is at 21%.

The main source of light in rural areas is a kerosene lamp, while in some areas such as the northern regions; dry-cell powered small bulbs are used as a light source. The literacy rate has also increased from 70% to 74%.

At 36%, the expenditure at

## **KEY FINDINGS FROM THE REPORT**

- 17% of Ugandans consume alcohol
- 33% save money informally
- Poverty gap is at 6.8%
- 2/3 of people's income spent on food
- 8% save money in banks
- 1% save money in SACCOs
- 67% have brick and iron sheet houses
- 52% use internet for social media
- 68% have mobile phones
- 10% own TVs
- 3% own laptops/computers
- 12% use internet for business
- 16% use internet for academic purposes
- Malaria is the largest killer
- Diabetes is the leading non-communicable disease

household level is largely taken up by food, while 22% expenditure goes into housing, water and catering for electricity bills. On education and transport, Ugandans spend 8% of their income, and 4% on health.

Paul Mungereza, the executive director of UBOS, said the data will help the country plan appropriately.

"Our duty is to provide statistics but also to make sure that people use it. We are a mirror, and when you look into the mirror, it gives you the exact picture," he said.

The report indicates that net primary school enrollment has decreased from 82% in 2013 to 80%.