

Cabinet to discuss food security

IMPROVEMENT

The agriculture minister said the food situation in Uganda has improved during the last one month

By Gerald Tenywa

As the prolonged dry spell persists in the region, Cabinet will meet today to discuss Uganda's food situation, according to Vincent Ssempiija, the Minister of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries.

On Friday, Kenya declared a national disaster, calling for aid to counter drought that is posing a big risk to people, livestock and wildlife. The Kenya Red Cross estimates that about 2.7 million people are in need of food aid after low rainfall in October and November and the next rainy season not due before April.

Ssempiija said the food situation in Uganda has improved during the last one month, following harvests in some parts of the country, where the rain was favourable for crops.

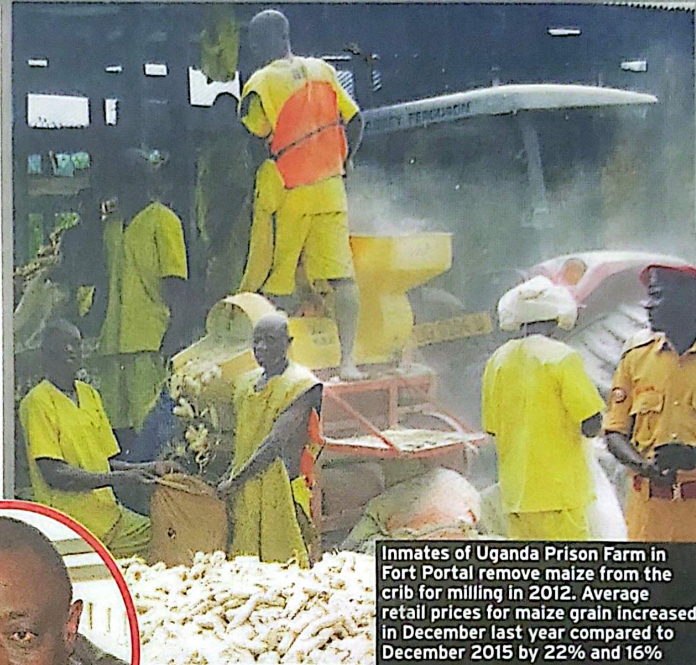
He, however, did not name the districts or share details of the yields. The minister also declined to share the detailed report concerning the current food status.

Sources at the agriculture said the Government on Friday shared the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) report with aid agencies to address the food needs in the country.

Market survey

The average price for maize grain was relatively stable across the country in December, with a price increase within 5% compared to November. This can be attributed the prospects of the second harvest that started later during the month, according to the World Food Programme (WFP) report.

Compared to the same period in December 2015, significant price increases were noted in Mbarara (71%), Tororo (40%), Lira (33%), Mbale (28%) and Kampala (20%). However, Gulu experienced a 35% reduction



Inmates of Uganda Prison Farm in Fort Portal remove maize from the crib for milling in 2012. Average retail prices for maize grain increased in December last year compared to December 2015 by 22% and 16%



Ssempiija

compared to December 2015, according to Monthly Market Monitor, a report by WFP.

The report states that the average retail prices for maize grain, sorghum and beans in Karamoja were higher in December 2016 compared to November in the same year. The report points out that the price of maize grain increased by 24%, sorghum by 14% and beans by 19%.

In some areas such as Napak and Moroto, where the food crisis has persisted since December, the people are now relying heavily on the sale of firewood and charcoal. Some are begging for food, according to the report.

As for Abim, Kotido, Kaabong, and parts of Napak, some poor households access long-cycle sorghum harvests, although harvests are below average. However, the report warns that most of the stock is likely to be depleted in March, leading to a crisis that is likely to last into June.

In areas that experience two rainy seasons, staple food prices are increasing in many key

term average (2013-2015), average prices for maize grain, sorghum and beans remained higher in December last year due to poor crop harvests. The average price for goats increased in December 2016 due to the increased demand for animals for slaughter during the Christmas season.

Rest of the country

There were significant increases in the average retail prices for maize grain and sorghum in December last year, compared to December 2015 by 22% and 16% respectively due to the poor crop performance in most parts of the country. Similarly, average prices for maize flour increased by 14% compared to December 2015.

The average retail price for beans in 2016 was relatively stable, but higher in eight out of 12 months compared to 2015 and the long-term average (2013-2015).

One meal a day

The Government last month released a report stating that people in 88 districts were having one meal or half a meal in a day. The worst affected districts that are in a crisis occupy the cattle corridor that runs from northeastern Uganda (Karamoja) across central Uganda to southern Uganda (Ntungamo and Rakai).

Food insecurity

Charles Owor, a commissioner in charge of disaster preparedness in the Office of the Prime Minister, said people are supposed to get two meals or three meals, including breakfast to lead normal lives.

When they are not assured of two meals, they slide into food insecurity regarded as the minimal phase, according to Owor. This could worsen with access to only one-and-a-half meals and this is referred to as stressed. With access to only one meal, such people get into a crisis. And when they get half a meal in a day or one meal in two days, such people require emergency intervention. This could end up in famine if the population cannot access even half a meal in a day.

Invading Uganda

Pastoralists from Teso and Acholi, Kenya, and South Sudan are putting additional pressure on the available resources. Pasture and water resources are similarly below average in the cattle corridor. This has resulted in poorer than normal livestock body conditions and poor milk production in these areas. Improved livestock conditions are expected in April with the start of first season rains.

INVASION

Pastoralists from Kenya and South Sudan are putting additional pressure on the available resources

markets, following two consecutive seasons of below-average production, according to the Famine Early Warning Systems Network of USAID.

In Teso and Acholi, for example, the wage from a day's labour currently purchases 1.3kg of millet compared to 2.3kg at this time last year. Many poor households are stressed, although agricultural labour opportunities in March and April are expected to increase household income, improving food access.

Compared to December 2015 and the long-