



Milestone. Government and WFP officials flag off the first consignment of 100 tonnes of maize bought from Karamoja recently. PHOTO BY DOROTHY NAKAWEESI

Karamoja starts plan to enhance food security

Optimism. The sub-region is now producing food for domestic consumption as well as export to the rest of the country and beyond.

BY PAUL TAJUBA
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NAPAK. A quick search about Karamoja on the Internet gives a gloomy picture of life in vast semi-arid north-east region.

Starving Karimojong begging for food aid due to drought and hundreds of children not attending school are some of the stories that crop up in the search engines.

As a result, Karamoja is regarded as a region dragging the rest of the country "behind" and it is common to hear statements like; "we shall not wait for Karamoja to develop".

However, this could soon be history after the World Food Programme (WFP) together with the ministry of Agriculture and the Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED), started educating the pastoralists on the need to grow their own food.

They were trained in agronomic practices, post-harvest handling and doing agriculture as a business.

Already, the sub-region is now producing food for domestic consumption as well as export to the rest of the country and beyond.

"The green belts of Karamoja can produce food, it is just an issue of mindset," said Mr El Khidir Daloum, the WFP country director, after the UN agency bought 98 metric tonnes of maize from the sub-region's small scale farmers recently.

"Nobody would believe

that we could buy maize from Karamoja, a sub-region historically known as a place of hunger, drought and food insecurity," he added.

He said 98 metric tonnes of maize bought from Nakapiripirit and Napak districts were later stored at Iriri and Namalu storage centres established by the UN agency at a cost of \$200,000.

"The tonnage is small when it comes to figures, but the message behind it is strong. Karamoja has been receiving, but today we are buying from them," Mr Daloum said.

Beneficiaries speak out

Mr Mathias Kidon, the head teacher of Kalotom Primary School, said the WFP initiative has improved nutritional and academic performance in the area.

"The children are now concentrating in class and have some two meals a day. In previous years, by 9 am, a child is sleeping yet a teacher is expected to deliver content to such a child," Mr Kidon said.

Rebecca Akol, a Primary Seven pupil at Pokong Primary School, said her performance has improved tremendously since she started having enough food.

"When I was a day scholar, I was getting 9s but now I get distinctions and credits because I am attentive in class after having meals," Akol said.

State minister for Karamoja Affairs Moses Kizige said the sub-region is transforming slowly from pastoralism to agriculture.

"Karamoja still has many challenges, with children leaving the area to go to Kampala streets and beg but with their own food production, this can be stopped," Mr Kizige said.

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WAKISO. The government has pledged to avail more funds for road construction and maintenance in Wakiso District.

The pledge was made by Local Government minister Tom Butime on Monday after a tour of selected roads:

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