



Sciences for Prosperity

UGANDA NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

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“The proportion of Ugandans unable to access adequate calories decreased from 23 percent in 1997 to 15 percent in 2006. 38 percent of children under 5 suffer from chronic malnutrition (stunting), 16 percent from underweight and 6 percent from acute malnutrition.” (FANTA II, 2010)

Nutritionalisation of Agriculture in Uganda - Role of Agriculture in Improving the Nutritional Status of Women and Children

BACKGROUND

Linking Agriculture and Nutrition in Uganda

Why, in a country like Uganda that is self-sustaining in food is there still persistent malnutrition among so many of the nation's most vulnerable populations? Despite recognition of the severe social, economic and medical consequences of malnutrition on pregnant women and young children, malnutrition remains a major challenge for Uganda. Experience shows that investing in agricultural production and growth does not necessarily result in improved nutrition. Hunger and under-nutrition arise from multiple, interactive causes that can be categorized as direct (including food consumption, care, and health) and indirect (including agricultural production, employment opportunities, women's status, and service delivery systems) (World Bank, 2007; Kurz and Johnson-Welch 2001). It seems intuitive that improving agricultural productivity or household income (indirect causes) would improve food availability (direct cause) and lead to better nutritional outcomes. However, this intuition – that producing more food or having more income allows for improved food consumption and leads to better nutrition – is not always realized (Berti et al., 2003). Stronger links between agriculture and nutrition require cultural, economic and social conditioning factors that take into account both direct and indirect causes of malnutrition (Berti, 2003).

The Ministries of Health (MoH) and Agriculture, Animal Industries and Fisheries (MAAIF), which are the lead ministries in food security and nutrition issues, are mandated by the Constitution of Uganda to set minimum standards, assure quality and develop relevant policies. A Food and Nutrition Policy for Uganda was developed and launched in 2003. The policy was developed for the purpose of providing a framework for food and nutrition issues in the country. At the time of its development, the policy was formulated within the context of the Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP). The overall objective of the policy was to promote the nutritional status of all the people of Uganda through multi-sectoral and co-coordinated interventions that focus on food security, improved nutrition and increased incomes. A National Food and Nutrition Strategy was also developed in 2005. Government acknowledges that the issues relating to food security and nutrition are multi-sectoral, involving both public and private stakeholders. Therefore, a National Food and Nutrition Council was established in 1987 in-order to coordinate the various stakeholders. The Council is also mandated to advise Government on the formulation of policies, providing guidelines on the implementation of the policy, research, monitoring and evaluation.

The question that many stakeholders ask is; why does Uganda continue to suffer negative trends in nutrition the aforementioned structures in place? The other frequently asked question is; why is it that the link between agriculture and nutrition is difficult to discern?

Purpose of UNAS Workshop

Against the above background, the Uganda National Academy of Sciences (UNAS) organised a workshop to analyze past and present (national and international) agricultural project and policy efforts meant to improve the nutritional status of women and children under 2 years of age in Uganda. UNAS convened a multi-sector, multi-disciplinary planning committee of experts to assist the academy in developing the conference agenda. Participants and speakers came from research, academia, academies, non-governmental and international aid agencies; and national government.

PLANNING COMMITTEE

UNAS convened a multi-sector, multi-disciplinary planning committee of experts to assist the academy in developing a conference agenda that reflected the latest thinking and encourages the most forward-looking discussions. The expertise of the committee included Public Health, Agriculture, Nutrition, Food Science & Technology, Agriculture Economics, Gender, Land Reform, and Policy. This variety of expertise was intended to bring diverse views needed to address how Uganda could improve nutrition outcomes of women and children through linkages between the agricultural and nutrition sectors. The Committee was Chaired by Prof. John Tuhe Kakitahi (FUNAS), with, committee members drawn from a number of government and non-governmental organizations as well as academia. This mix of expertise was useful in catalysing dialogue on the issues included on the agenda and sharing of experiences on the work done in the area.

VOICES FROM THE WORKSHOP

“The need for action to prioritise efforts against malnutrition was apparent”

- Uganda needs to make nutrition a national priority in-order to ensure progress in women and children’s health. One way to do this is to better link sectors involved to more effectively coordinate the work of those addressing mother and child malnutrition.
- The country should look beyond just filling bellies with food and make sure children are provided with a variety of nutritious foods that will strengthen brain development and improve their intellect.
- Nutrition education of all members of the family and all sectors of government needs to be a main concern of policy makers and program planners.
- Finalisation of the National Food and Nutrition Bill to help kick start the National Food and Nutrition Council should be expedited.

RELATED INTERNATIONAL EFFORTS ON NUTRITION

Leaders from across the globe gathered at the United Nations a month after the Uganda meeting and emphasized the importance of working in partnership to tackle the crisis of malnutrition. They stressed that success in achieving the Millennium Development Goals depended on it. By creating such alliances that support efforts to scale up nutrition, all the players – governments, civil society organizations and donors – are upholding the principles agreed to in the Paris Declaration (2005) and the Accra Agenda for Action, (2008). These include:

- strengthening coordination;

- improving alignment with national priorities for malnutrition reduction using existing platforms and thereby reducing transaction costs for national governments;
- delivering and demonstrating greater nutritional impact through programs that tackle the underlying causes of malnutrition; and
- consistently tracking the resources channeled toward improving nutrition through all programs as part of a commitment to assisting countries in improving accountability and aligning reporting on progress of country objectives.

Hon Sam Kuteesa, the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Uganda, who also attended the meeting expressed the commitment of the Ugandan government to increase the budget for nutrition intervention as a percentage of health spending.

MEMORABLE QUOTES FROM THE WORKSHOP

“Good nutrition plays a pivotal role as both an outcome and input of successful agriculture, health, education, and water & sanitation policies and programs. As such, nutrition can provide the common ground where these sectors meet – the essential interface that enables long-term links to be forged and mutual benefits to be realized.”

- Prof. Apolo R. Nsibambi, Rt. Hon. Prime Minister of Uganda

“We all know that nutritional security can only be achieved through a broad and comprehensive approach which requires health, agriculture and economic sectors all to be deployed to focus on this problem.”

- His Excellency, Ambassador Jerry P. Lanier, Ambassador of the USA to Uganda

“It is a central factor of health that proper nutrition be upheld especially for children since they are universally affected in their growth if they are not well fed and well looked after ... these are important issues that impede on development of our nation and other nations and not only Uganda.”

- Prof. Paul E. Mugambi, UNAS President

NEXT STEPS

Following the workshop, UNAS is working on setting up an “impact-driven” committee that will take the messages of this workshop forward as well as address other important, topics related to nutrition. A summary report of the meeting will be available in hard copy and on the UNAS website (www.ugandanationalacademy.org) in January, 2011. In addition, three targeted Policy Briefs (this is the first one) addressing key issues discussed at the workshop will be prepared and circulated in hard copy and on the UNAS website.

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UGANDA NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

The Uganda National Academy of Sciences (UNAS) was founded in 2000 and granted a Presidential Charter in 2009 as the National Academy for Uganda. Like many other academies of science, UNAS is an autonomous body that brings together a diverse group of scientists from the physical, biological, and social and behavioral sciences. These scientists work together in an interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary manner to achieve their main goal of promoting excellence in science by offering independent, evidence-based advice for the prosperity of Uganda.

The mission of the Uganda National Academy of Sciences (UNAS) is to advance the ability of Uganda to address its most serious national development challenges by (1) engaging in a series of scientific activities designed to elucidate potential evidence-based solutions to pressing national and regional health concerns; (2) enhancing the general capacity of UNAS to provide relevant and useful scientific policy advice and (3) building Uganda's appreciation of and demand for advice from the Academy.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Copies of the full report will be available from the Uganda National Academy of Sciences Secretariat after completion of the peer-review process. It will also be available at www.ugandanationalacademy.org

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