

FROM THE EDITOR

Food security

Food security is a major concern in Uganda.

According to the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification for Karamoja, in North Eastern Uganda, 361,000 people are estimated to be experiencing high levels of acute food insecurity at crisis level or worse.

The food security prospects of Karamoja are expected to worsen due to frequent dry spells and lack of extension services affect production.

Timely solutions aimed at resilience are key in such communities.

Happy festivities.

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Seeds of GOLD

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Janet Molly Achilla, is the chairperson of Canapwonya Development Association at Otalabar village, Labor in Abim District. The widow, who lost his husband in 2008, was unable to fully provide for herself and her children until she joined the association the Village Savings and Loans association that opened up a cereal bank. The decision has paid off as her family now has enough to eat.

BY GEORGE KATONGOLE

Women in the vulnerable Karamoja region have found a way to ensure food security for their families using cereal banks.

Vulnerable agro pastoral communities in the semi-arid region of Karamoja in Uganda have resorted to cereal banking as a coping mechanism to their food security threats.

The idea of introducing cereal banking emerged as part of resilience of the pastoral communities.

In 2003, Canapwonya Development Association started as a savings group but it went on evolving to tackle other issues such as gender-based violence, public speaking, health and sanitation, before the necessity to increase food security drove the 30 members to cereal banking. “At first, it was an opportunity to make money from the interest but also offering food at affordable prices during the time of need,” Janet Molly Achilla, is the chairperson of Canapwonya Development Association, says.

How it works

A cereal bank buys grain at its lowest price. It is then stocked and sold throughout the year with a profit cushion to provide funds to restock the following year. At the same time, families that borrow food from the cere-

Karamojong women place hope on cereal banks



Traditionally, the Karimojong have granaries, but they are smaller in size. They are vulnerable to ravages of rodents and pests. PHOTO BY GEORGE KATONGOLE.

al bank can pay back in kind.

According to Mathias Kionga, the secretary of the association, they started by buying cereal worth Shs6.5m from ADRA which was bagged and stored for six months. The money earned was put on the group account to lend to others at an interest.

The Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) supports Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLA) that runs cereal banks with seed capital while training them on advocacy.

Through the Action for Social Change Programme (ASC) supported by ADRA Denmark in four countries; Burundi, Malawi, Rwanda and Uganda, communities are supported using pub-

lic dialogue and inter-personal communication to promote community empowerment by creating social change.

Diversification

The group’s advocacy has made them change agents in the community and from social change they now operate three accounts; cereal banking, seed capital and the VSLA savings which they share after 12 months. Last year, the 25 members had saved up to Shs17m from the Shs3,000 weekly savings.

In 2016, Kionga, the secretary of the Sacco was asked to contact ADRA, because of a great famine in the area, to buy grain and lat-

er sell at a good price.

Their sorghum was stored in their cereal bank for over six months and sold each bag for Shs60,000 almost doubling their money.

Whereas a kilogramme of sorghum in Karamoja goes for as low as Ush 1,000 during harvest time, it can more than double during the dry season due to scarcity.

More benefits

They have now accumulated more than Shs20m and seek support to construct granaries to continue providing solutions to hunger, volatile food prices and scarcity during the dry season. They also seek training

in agronomy, post-harvest handling and management, record keeping and marketing to improve their operations.

Diana Balaba Sande, ADRA’s Advocacy and Public Relations Officer said: “the cereal banking system was identified as one of the most appropriate strategies to break the cycle of food scarcity, rising food prices and dependency on food aid among the Karamojong.”

There are drawbacks. Kionga reported that some borrowers default leaving villages as hungry as before.

But Balaba says cereal banks are unique.

“We are not trying to necessarily generate wealth. The banks are for survival.”

Did you know? Uganda cabinet approves ban on Kenyan farm products

Uganda will restrict from its domestic market certain raw and processed agricultural products from Kenya in a reciprocal move that follows her eastern neighbours’ continued ban on some of her farm products.

On Monday, the Ugandan cabinet finally agreed to this nearly two-year-old proposal which has often been opposed by President Yoweri Museveni.

According to Ms Rebecca Kadaga, who concurrently serves as Uganda’s minister for East African Affairs, Ugandan cabinet has directed the agriculture ministry to identify and



list particular Kenyan products that will then be banned by the Ugandan government “in a short time.”

“We have been too patient. In the past, we have not reciprocated, but now we are going to.

This has gone on for too long and within a short time they too will understand what we are going through,” Kadaga warned. Kadaga addressed the media on Tuesday morning.

Hostilities

Kenya and Uganda have for long had trade fights but the latest hostilities between the two EAC partner states began brewing in December 2019, when Kenya stopped importing Ugandan milk, particularly the Lato brand.

In July 2020, Kenya followed up with a ban on Ugandan

sugar, against an earlier agreement to increase Uganda’s sugar exports to Kenya.

Players within Uganda’s poultry industry too this week petitioned their government over Kenya’s ban of Uganda’s poultry products from her market for nearly a year now.

Kenya maintains that some of the products are substandard and that it is protecting its domestic market.

Kenya is Uganda’s biggest trade partner. Kenya’s exports to Uganda were worth \$673.66 million in 2020 while Uganda’s exports to Kenya stood at \$465.55 million during the same period.

— Source: Daily Nation

