

End of WFP initiative leaves learners staring at hunger

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BY SIMON PETER EMWAMU

Government-aided secondary schools and tertiary institutions across the Karamoja Sub-region are grappling with uncertainty following the closure of the World Food Programme (WFP) school feeding initiative.

The programme has supported learning institutions in Karamoja for more than six decades. It has been a critical intervention in a region perennially affected by food insecurity and malnutrition, factors often blamed for poor academic performance.

On October 29, 2025, the Ministry of Education and Sports, through its Permanent Secretary, issued a circular formally notifying districts, schools, and local leaders of the phased withdrawal of WFP's free feeding programme for secondary schools, effective January 1, 2026.

Mr Kedrace Turyagenda, the ministry's Permanent Secretary, said it was time for secondary schools to seek alternative feeding arrangements, clarifying that the WFP-supported programme for primary schools remains unaffected.

Currently, WFP continues to support more than 300 government-aided primary schools, community schools,



Meal time at Rupa Seed School in Moroto District. PHOTO/ SIMON PETER EMWAMU

and early childhood learning centres across Karamoja.

Mr Meri Jino, the Kaabong District chairperson, said the decision to end food supplies to secondary schools and tertiary institutions was communicated late last year, leaving schools and districts with little time to prepare.

"The decision was reached without adequate consultation of local leadership," Mr Jino said on Monday. "More than 84 percent of Karamoja's popula-

COMMUNICATION

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tion lives in poverty. Without the feeding programme, schools will be forced to look for alternative means of survival, most likely through increasing fees."

He warned that higher fees could trigger a spike in school dropouts, especially among vulnerable households.

That is because the WFP support cushioned schools from frequent fee increments.

"Without it, the burden will inevitably shift to parents, many of whom can-

not afford it," he added.

Mr Jino said Karamoja should have been granted a transition year to allow schools and communities to plan for the gap left by WFP.

In Kaabong District, schools such as Kaabong Secondary School, Ik Seed Secondary School, and several tertiary institutions, both government and private had been beneficiaries of the programme.

Dependency on humanitarian aid

Kotido District chairperson Paul Lotee Komol acknowledged that the decision would strain schools but said long-term dependency on humanitarian aid was unsustainable.

"We feel the pinch, but interventions are not meant to last forever," Mr Komol said. "As district leaders, we must sit down and find alternatives to ensure continuity and improve the learning environment."

He said secondary schools likely to be affected in Kotido include Kotido SS, Kacheri SS, Panyangara SS, and Panyangara Seed School.

However, some school administrators say the impact will be uneven.

Mr Lazarus Hyuha, the head teacher of Lolachat Seed School in Nabilatuk District, said his school would not be affected, having never benefited from the WFP programme despite efforts to be enrolled since 2018.

"Failure to join the programmes was a blessing in disguise," Mr Hyuha said. "We have been feeding our learners using our resources, providing clean beans and posho."

He warned, however, that schools previously dependent on WFP support may be forced to hike fees to bridge the gap, a move likely to spark resistance from parents in a region still battling entrenched poverty.

As schools reopen, education stakeholders in Karamoja fear the end of the feeding programme could hinder access, retention, and completion rates unless alternative support mechanisms are instituted.