

Information from the health ministry indicates that there is a sharp regional variation in malnutrition, with Karamoja, Tooro and refugee-hosting districts as some of the most affected.

BY TONNY ABET

The Director General of Health Services at the Ministry of Health, Dr Charles Olaro, has revealed that two million children in Uganda are stunted due to malnutrition, significantly affecting their health and future productivity.

Information from the ministry indicates that there is also a sharp regional variation in malnutrition, with Karamoja, Tooro and refugee-hosting districts as some of the most affected.

"You can have food and you could be eating every day but still have malnutrition. That is because inadequate dietary diversity is the main driver of malnutrition. One should evaluate their meals to see if they have all the components that are necessary for body building, energy giving and all the micronutrients?" Dr Olaro said.

He said children who struggle with malnutrition and stunting also tend to struggle with issues such as diabetes later in life because their pancreas is not well developed to handle sugar in daily food intake when they are adults.

Dr Olaro was speaking during the launch of the national nutrition advocacy campaign in Kampala on Tuesday. The campaign was dubbed "Nutrition for All," aimed at addressing malnutrition drivers within the population.

Dr Samalie Namukose, the assistant commissioner-in-charge of nutrition at the ministry, said about 26 percent of Ugandan children are stunted. That means they are too short for their age, and there are big consequences

# 2 million Ugandan children stunted



Mothers bring children for medical check up and immunisation in Apac in April 2025. Children are some of the hardest hit in the wave of flu and cough. PHOTO/TONNY ABET

associated with stunting.

"A stunted child cannot perform well in class due to limited brain development, they cannot grow well and cannot contribute to the social and economic development of our country," she said.

## FEEDING GUIDELINES FOR BABIES (6 - 24 MONTHS)

- Breastfeed babies between six and nine months.
- The child should be started on soft foods and fruits.
- The child must be given at least three small main meals and three snacks in between meals daily.
- Ensure the baby has enough food for his or her small size.
- Give mashed meals made from a mixture of different foods.
- Feed the child on different foods at each meal every day.
- Prepare porridge from maize, millet and sorghum flour.

## Ideal foods for children

- Little sugar and oil/ margarine/ butter in porridge or mashed foods.
- A spoonful of groundnut paste in baby porridge and mashed food.
- A spoonful of mashed avocado into the baby food.
- A spoonful of mukene (silver fish) flour.
- A spoonful of mashed beans, milled beans, chickpeas, milled pumpkin, or greens.
- Malted porridge from fermented cereals (ferment or germinate millet, sorghum or maize seeds before milling into flour).
- Skinned beans, scrapped meat, matooke pieces, cooked and mashed and fed to the child when still hot.

Dr Namukose also said four percent of Ugandan children are wasted, meaning they are too thin for their height.

"There is regional variation in the levels of malnutrition. Karamoja Sub-region has the highest level of malnutrition year in year out. They also have the highest number of the most stunted, most wasted children. Recently, the Tooro Sub-region, despite being a food basket, has also been affected by malnutrition," she revealed.

Mr Zakaria Fusheini, the Unicef Uganda chief of nutrition officer, explained why some areas with a lot of food are struggling with malnutrition, and he highlighted interventions.

"We did studies with Kyambogo University, and we found that in a household, the child is being fed on matooke (plantains), matooke, matooke. Most times, it is not blended with other food types such as vegetables, fruits, animal protein or milk," he said.

"We should be able to give at least five different sources of food mixed together to grow healthy. Their mothers don't have the right information, and that is the purpose of this campaign: to reach these people," he added.

Mr Zakaria highlighted the new intervention of promoting egg powder for feeding children.

"We know from evidence that if you give an egg to a child every day, at least for six months, you will reverse the negative consequences of stunting and the effect is much more felt between 0-2 years," he said.

"The egg powder is an initiative by the Ministry of Health with the private sector and support of partners like Unicef to ensure the egg improves the nutritional status," he added.

Ministry of Health officials also emphasised the importance of exclusive breastfeeding in the first six months of the baby to ensure the baby gets the required nutrients for growth and health.

They also advised parents that once the baby is introduced to solid food or after weaning off breastmilk, children must be provided with essential nutrients for health, energy and growth. These are contained in milk, eggs, vegetables, fruits, beans and meat, among others.