

Locals unite in fight against malnutrition

KABAROLE

By Jonan Tusingwire

According to the Uganda Demographic and Health Survey (UDHS) 2022 and the Kabarole District Nutrition Action Plan, the nutrition situation in Kabarole remains a serious public health challenge, especially among children under five years and mothers.

The reports show that Kabarole, as part of the wider Tooro sub-region, continues to record high levels of child malnutrition; 40.6% of children under five are stunted, meaning they are too short for their age due to chronic malnutrition, far above the national average of 29%.

Between 2.4% and 3.4% of children are wasted, indicating acute malnutrition; 10.3% of babies are born with low birth weight (below 2.5kg), often linked to poor maternal nutrition.

About 45% of children under five and 29.4% of women of reproductive age suffer from anaemia.

FOOD SECURITY

Ironically, despite the high



Atwine

malnutrition levels, the Tooro sub-region is considered relatively food secure. According to the Uganda Bureau of Statistics' 2024 census, about 67% of households are food secure, placing the sub-region second nationally after Ankole.

Brian Kisembo, the chairperson of Kabarole District Nutrition Committee, says the challenge is not food scarcity, but poor nutrition practices.

He highlights key drivers of malnutrition as poor feeding practices, low dietary diversity, the sale of most household food produce, limited nutrition knowledge and poor sanitation and hygiene.

Ronald Mutegeki, the deputy minister of information in Tooro kingdom, echoes this concern.

"People do not know when to eat what. We have households that eat



Twesigomwe

one type of meal from Monday to Monday, which is bad," Mutegeki notes.

He urged stakeholders to strengthen community-level sensitisation on proper nutrition.

COMMUNITY ACTION

In response, community initiatives are playing a growing role in tackling malnutrition at the grassroots level.

In Hakibale sub-county, the Kamutebe Twekambe Group is actively improving nutrition through savings, livestock and farming. Started in 2020 in Kyakaguju village, the group has 25 members, 20 women and five men, who save shs10,000 weekly.

Emily Atwine, the group's chairperson, says savings have enabled the group to invest in goats,

STATISTICS

In 2020, Kabarole developed a nutrition action plan running up to 2025. The plan shows that stunting reduced from 45.6% in 2011 to 40.6% in 2016, but the district now faces a double burden of malnutrition, indicating that it is currently struggling with under-nutrition (stunting, wasting and anaemia) and over-nutrition.

some of which provide milk for children to improve their nutrition.

The group also runs demonstration gardens where members learn improved farming practices for vegetables and other foods.

ROLE PLAYED BY MEN

The group also introduced role model men to promote shared responsibility in homes and improve nutrition outcomes.

These men encourage others to support their wives in household chores and nutrition planning. Alex Twesigomwe, a 39-year-old role model father of four, says attitudes

are changing. "We make decisions together with our wives and we have encouraged men to take good care of their wives during pregnancy," Twesigomwe says.

The initiative has also improved acceptance of indigenous vegetables, such as African nightshade (*eswiga*), which were previously rejected by some men.

Atwine said: "Before, men used to reject vegetables. But after being taught by role model men, many now appreciate them."

The community efforts are being strengthened by the Catalysing Strengthened Policy Action for Healthy Diets and Resilience project.

The euro 10m project, funded by the Dutch ministry of foreign affairs, aims to improve food security and reduce malnutrition among at least a million women and children in Uganda.

Daisy Immaculate, the project manager, says the initiative focuses on strengthening nutrition policy implementation, supporting agricultural innovation and empowering women economically to make healthy food decisions.

Harriet Nyakake, the deputy prime minister of Tooro, said the project has exposed the severity of malnutrition.