

# Tooro steps up malnutrition fight

The crisis has contributed to poor cognitive development and increased child mortality.

BY ALEXASHABA

**T**ooro Kingdom, in partnership with development partners and local governments across the sub-region, have launched the process of developing a food and nutrition action plan aimed at addressing the persistent burden of malnutrition and stunted growth among children under five years.

The five-year action plan, which will run from 2026 to 2030, will target homes, schools, places of worship and communities, with stakeholders expected to play a central role in the implementation.

The initiative comes at a time when the Tooro Sub-region continues to register some of the highest malnutrition levels in Uganda despite being one of the country's top food-producing areas.

According to the 2022 Uganda Demographic and Health Survey (UDHS), stunting among children under five in Tooro stands at 38.7 percent, making the sub-region the third most affected in the country after Karamoja at 43.9 percent and Kigezi at 41.5 percent. The figures remain far above the national average of 26 percent.

The report further indicates that severe stunting in Tooro stands at 14.4 percent, the second highest nationally after Karamoja's 19.7 percent, and well above the national average of nine percent.

The survey also shows that 11.3 percent of children under five in Tooro are underweight, slightly above the national average of 10.2 percent. Severely underweight children account for 3.2 percent, while overweight children account for 2.5 percent.

To implement the programme, Tooro Kingdom is partnering with the CASCADE project implemented by CARE International in Uganda through the Kyenjojo Association of Women Development Actors (KAWODA), alongside district local governments across the sub-region.

The Tooro Kingdom deputy prime minister, Ms Harriet Nyakake, said the people within the kingdom produce enough food, but households continue to prioritise selling the food instead of preserving



The deputy prime minister of Tooro Kingdom, Ms Harriet Nyakake, addresses stakeholders at Muchwa in Fort Portal City, Kabarole District last Saturday. PHOTO/ ALEXASHABA

enough for family consumption.

"Our nine counties across the kingdom are food secure, but the challenge is that most of the food produced is sold on the market, leaving very little for household consumption. We want our people to plan better for their families and understand the importance of proper nutrition. Communities should embrace indigenous foods as a way of addressing malnutrition," Ms Nyakake said on Saturday.

She noted that once completed, the action plan will guide investments, partnerships, accountability mechanisms and prioritisation of interventions aimed at improving nutrition outcomes, strengthening food systems and addressing socio-economic vulnerabilities in the region.

Ms Nyakake identified limited dietary diversity, unsafe food consumption and excessive commercialisation of food crops as some of the major drivers of food and nutrition insecurity in Tooro.

Under the new strategy, the kingdom plans to intensify sensitisation campaigns on nutrition, mindset change and child feeding practices, with a strong emphasis on indigenous foods rich in nutrients.

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## THE CHALLENGE

**Ms Harriet Nyakake, the deputy prime minister of Tooro Kingdom, says, the nine counties across the kingdom are food secure, but the challenge is that most of the food produced is sold on the market, leaving very little for household consumption. "We want our people to plan better for their families and embrace proper nutrition. They should embrace indigenous foods as a way of addressing malnutrition."**

igenous foods that contain essential nutrients for child growth. Schools should also have plans to ensure children have meals while at school," she said.

She also expressed concern over poor parenting practices, saying some parents continue to abandon childcare responsibilities, leaving infants in daycare centres or with elderly grandparents, who may lack adequate resources to provide proper nutrition.

"We also have teenage mothers with lim-

ited knowledge about proper child feeding. As a kingdom, we are now advocating against child marriage, and we shall not issue marriage certificates to underage couples," she added.

Ms Nyakake said the kingdom intends to use its existing cultural administrative structure, down to sub-county chiefs, to monitor implementation of the action plan.

The Kingdom also plans to promote nutritious indigenous crops through the establishment of demonstration gardens and seed banks across all nine counties.

Ms Catherine Kemigabo, the Kabarole District Health Educator, said schools and parents must work together to strengthen school feeding programmes to improve learners' nutrition and concentration in class.

"We need to engage school administrators and parents so that children can have meals at school. Even for learners who carry packed food, we need to assess whether the food is nutritious and safe. Some schools already have feeding programmes where parents contribute maize and beans for preparation of students' meals," she said.

Ms Enid Achiro, a consultant who researched the causes of persistent malnu-

trition in Tooro, said the crisis has contributed to poor cognitive development, low school performance and increased child mortality.

She explained that the proposed action plan seeks to address existing gaps by integrating cultural leadership and aligning district nutrition strategies under one coordinated regional framework.

"The kingdom is now better positioned to promote positive nutrition behaviours, support food systems transformation, and influence community norms and practices," she said.

Ms Achiro added that climate change, post-harvest losses, poor dietary diversity and the growing shift toward cash crop farming at the expense of food crops continue to threaten food and nutrition security in the region.

She added that many households lack proper food storage facilities, forcing families to sell most of their harvest immediately after production.

Mr Brian Kisembo, the chairperson of the Kabarole District Nutrition Committee, said authorities also intend to discourage excessive use of agricultural chemicals and promote proper hygiene and food preservation practices at the household level.