

Nutrition week to focus on schools



A demonstration garden at St Kizito Primary School, Bugolobi, Kampala. Legislators and development partners are advocating for such initiatives to improve school feeding programmes. PHOTO/LOMINDA AFEDRARU

LOMINDA AFEDRARU

Feeding Uganda's population with a nutritious diet requires moving past mere food sufficiency to ensure access to balanced, bio fortified diets.

It also means addressing systemic challenges across local agriculture such as climate-smart farming, tackling poverty and expanding nutritional education to ensure every region has access to a diverse mix of food.

This is the thinking of legislators under the Uganda Parliamentary Alliance on Food & Nutrition Security (UPA-FNS) and development partners who are set to organise the 5th Parliamentary nutrition week in Iganga from June 22 to 27.

This year's focus is feeding school children with nutritious food under the theme 'Nourishing the minds, empowering the future.'

Background

The chairperson of the UPA-FNS, Milton K Muvuma explained the background of advancing the agenda of nutrition in the country, saying legislators started the initiative in 2018

The non-partisan alliance of past

and present Members of Parliament works closely with Non-Governmental Organisations such as Food Rights Alliance, Participatory Ecological Land Use Management (Pellum) and Food and Agriculture Organisation among others to address food insecurity and malnutrition through legislation, advocacy and budgetary oversight.

The team holds a nutrition advocacy week every year with the previous one held in Kamwenge, Western Uganda and Moroto in Karamoja sub region.

"The aim is to achieve comprehensive food security in Uganda which relies interconnected focus areas - namely nutrition balance which transitions from monotonous foods consisting of starch to Energy giving foods such as maize, millet, cassava to body building foods such as beans, groundnuts, milk, fish to protective foods like vegetables and fruits," Mr Kavuma says.

"Others are bio fortification utilising crops specifically bred to address micronutrient deficiencies, such as iron-rich beans and Vitamin A-enriched orange sweet potatoes."

Nutrition week

The Bukooli Island County Member of Parliament, Mr Peter Okeyo

MEASURES TO IMPROVE FOOD NUTRITION

Dr Milton Rukundo, senior lecturer in the department of Nutritional science and diets University of Kyambogo noted that in most cases people think food is nutrition yet nutrition involves, food water, primary health care protection, education among others. He notes that much as Uganda is grappling with nutrition challenges, there is rampant food waste and the country lacks food warehouses. Therefore, to address nutrition challenges, there is need for farmers and other stakeholders to embrace value addition and healthy diets. There must be deliberate control of food waste, establish community seed banks for farmers to access quality seed and grow nutritional food.

said this year's focus is on feeding school children.

"School feeding is an investment in agriculture and the legislators have been encouraging schools to establish school gardens where

school children can grow their own nutritious food ranging from vegetables and bio fortified sweet potatoes and beans," he noted.

He contends that Busoga used to be a food basket one time but because of sugarcane growing, food is becoming scarce. This leaves children in the region with no food to pack and take to school.

Many children, as a result, have dropped out of school.

During the celebrations, the team will sensitize the Busoga community and learners to embrace school gardens.

Role of development partners

Ms Mary Apio, the Advocacy officer at Pellum noted that her team emphasises communities and schools to adopt growing of indigenous crops which are so nutritious in nature to address the issue of feeding on nutritious food.

"Despite the well-documented benefits of school feeding in boosting enrolment, attendance, retention and learning outcomes, the reality remains that school feeding in Uganda is fragmented, underfunded and lacks strong policy backing," she notes.

Giving the statistical data, Ms Apio notes that shockingly, about 67 percent of children in Uganda's Universal Primary Education (UPE) schools attend classes without the benefit of a school meal.

Out of over 8.2 million learners, only roughly 48,000 receive meals through government-supported programs, mostly reliant on donor-funded initiatives like those of the World Food Programme.

Yet evidence clearly shows that every US dollar invested in school feeding can generate up to nine dollars in economic returns that translate into healthier children, better education outcomes and a more productive future workforce.

This year's Nutrition Week provides a vital platform to raise awareness and galvanize action.

It's a call to all of us to work together toward meeting Sustainable Development Goal two on Zero Hunger and Uganda's national nutrition targets under the Uganda Nutrition Action Plan II.

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