



Household food security situation in Napak District, Karamoja sub-region, Uganda

This policy brief highlights different aspects of food and nutrition security among women and children in pastoralist and agropastoralist households in Napak District, Uganda. It reports the findings from a community-based cross-sectional study, including a household survey complemented by interviews and focus group discussions and concludes with action points and policy recommendations.

Background

Food security remains a critical challenge in the Karamoja sub-region of northeastern Uganda, influenced by a combination of socio-economic, environmental, and cultural factors. Despite food being a fundamental human right, billions worldwide, including in Karamoja, struggle to meet their nutritional needs [1]. In this region, the situation is exacerbated by climate change, political instability, weather-related fluctuations, high prevalence of

KEY MESSAGES

- Food insecurity in Napak is primarily driven by poverty, low income, low education, and climate-vulnerable agriculture and livestock keeping.
- Most households cannot afford adequate or nutritious food, resulting in low dietary diversity and persistent malnutrition, especially among women and children.
- Cultural food-sharing practices and seasonal migration further deepen vulnerability and weaken household food security.
- A holistic approach, supported by integrated investments in livelihoods, climate-resilient agriculture, education, gender equity, and targeted food assistance, provides sustainable long-term solutions.



of diseases, weak infrastructure, insecurity, cattle raids, and cultural norms that hinder the consumption of nutritious foods, especially among women and children [2, 3, 4]. Napak, one of the largest districts in the region, faces particularly severe food insecurity and malnutrition. The district's large size and high number of households exacerbate the food insecurity situation compared to other districts in Karamoja [5]. The major livelihood in Napak district is livestock keeping and farming, with most households practicing pastoralism and agropastoralism [6]. Traditionally, livestock are central to food security, income, and social status. However, increasing challenges have pushed many communities to shift from nomadic pastoralism to more sedentary and diversified livelihoods, including crop production, small businesses and casual labour [6].

Methods

The basis for this policy brief is a community-based cross-sectional study conducted in Napak District. The study employed both quantitative and qualitative methods [7]. Quantitative data were drawn from 230 households through a baseline food security and nutrition survey conducted by the Drylands Transform Project ([Drylands Transform | sl.u.se](http://DrylandsTransform.slu.se)) [6]. Complementing this, qualitative data were gathered through six Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and four Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), with participants purposively selected for their expertise and experience in the region [7]. This approach formed the basis for actionable policy recommendations aimed at improving food security and well-being of the region's residents.

Findings

A. Low household income

A significant proportion of households in Napak earn below 820 USD annually, which severely limits their ability to afford food and other essential services. Lack of financial resources constrains access to both adequate and nutritious food, pushing households into cycles of poverty and food insecurity.

B. Localized livestock insecurity

Livestock is the main source of food, income, and household assets in Napak. However, frequent droughts, livestock diseases, and insecurity often lead to herd losses, reducing access to milk, meat, and income. This weakens household coping mechanisms, increases food shortages, and negatively affects the nutrition and overall well-being of vulnerable groups, especially women and children.

C. Inadequate agricultural productivity

Erratic rainfall patterns, soil degradation, and pest infestations significantly affect agricultural output in Napak. The reliance on subsistence farming makes the region particularly vulnerable to food insecurity, as households struggle to grow sufficient food to meet their needs, especially during periods of drought or poor harvests.

D. Limited food diversity

Limited diversity of food crops, often including only sorghum, maize, and wild greens, results in poor dietary diversity. This lack of variety in the food supply leads to malnutrition, especially among



children, who require a more balanced diet to thrive.

E. Cultural practices

Traditional food-sharing practices in many households prioritize men and boys, often leaving women and children with smaller or less nutritious portions of food. These cultural norms exacerbate gender inequality and contribute to the malnutrition of women and children, who are already more vulnerable to food insecurity.

F. Limited education levels

A large percentage of household heads in Napak lack formal education, hindering their ability to adopt improved farming practices, make informed decisions regarding nutrition and food security, reducing their access to formal job opportunities or manage small businesses. Education is a critical tool for economic mobility and long-term resilience, yet it remains a barrier for many in the district.

G. Seasonal migration and labour seeking

Due to limited local economic opportunities, many young people, particularly women, migrate to other regions, such as Nairobi, in search of employment. While this can offer temporary economic relief, it also leaves families without stable support systems, further deepening food insecurity in their absence.

Conclusion

The food security situation in Napak District is a complex, multi-dimensional issue that requires a comprehensive and coordinated approach.

The study reveals that low household income, inadequate pastoral and agricultural productivity, limited education, and cultural food-sharing practices are the primary drivers of food insecurity. Addressing these factors will require targeted interventions in agricultural support, economic empowerment, education interventions, gender equity, and food assistance programs.

ACTION POINTS

To address the root causes of food insecurity in Napak District, the following policy interventions are proposed:

- **Agricultural Support and Climate Adaptation Strategies**
 - Providing farmers with drought-resistant seeds and improved farming methods will help mitigate the effects of erratic weather patterns, improving crop yields, and food security.
 - Implementing irrigation systems and water conservation practices can reduce dependency on rainfall, ensuring a more stable and sustainable agricultural output, especially in dry seasons.
- **Income Generation and Employment Programs**
 - Introducing vocational training for household heads can diversify income sources and help families generate consistent income to purchase food and meet other essential needs.
 - Promoting small businesses through microfinance loans will help households increase their income-generating potential, reducing their reliance on subsistence farming and vulnerability to market fluctuations.



ACTION POINTS

- **Educational Interventions**
 - Adult Literacy Programs can provide critical skills in nutrition, business management, and agricultural techniques, empowering households to improve food security.
 - Encouraging school enrollment and retention, especially for girls, will break the cycle of poverty by equipping future generations with the skills necessary to improve household food security and resilience.
- **Community Sensitization on Gender Equity and Food Distribution**
 - Awareness Campaigns on Equitable Food Sharing to raise awareness about gender-sensitive food distribution practices will help ensure that women and children receive adequate, nutritious food within households, addressing the imbalance created by cultural food-sharing customs.
 - Empowering women through leadership programs and community decision-making will ensure that women have more control over food distribution and household nutrition.
- **Food Assistance and Nutrition Programs**
 - Establishing school feeding programs can provide essential nutrition to children, supporting their development and education while addressing malnutrition.
 - Community food banks and emergency relief programs can provide immediate support to vulnerable households, especially during times of crisis or crop failure. However, emergency relief is not a long-term solution.

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Author: MSc Jean Lomongin

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Institution: Department of Community Health and Behavioural Sciences, School of Public Health, Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda.



Dr Alice Turinawe (alice.turinawe@mak.ac.ug)

Prof. Denis Mpairwe (denis.mpairwe@mak.ac.ug)

MSc Jean Lomongin
(lomonginjean2@gmail.com)

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